

Administrative traditions matter. The Italian style and the New Public Management.

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Abstract

The paper aims to analyze the Italian administrative tradition and its influence on administrative reforms. To accomplish it the paper traces the main characteristics of the Italian public administration which have been developed through its historical path. The research focuses particularly on the reaction of the administrative system to the neo-managerial reforms attempted in the last three decades and it gives a wide picture, with a historical approach, of the Italian administrative system at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The theme is relevant as the Italian state has always been characterized by high levels of political patronage and legalism with a substantial abuse of politics over the public administration that has hindered the formation of an effective and stable public administration. The paper looks into administrative reforms, with the tools of the institutional historian, and it demonstrates the prominence of the Italian administrative tradition over the paradigm of the New Public Management/Governance which shaped the reforms of the eighties, nineties and early 2000s.

The article investigates, with a historical approach, the development of the Italian public administration considering, on the background, the legacy of a hard process of political and administrative unification in the nineteenth century and a difficult State-building for the peculiarities of the Italian State's history.

The discovery of the Italian administrative tradition is a fundamental achievement to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the relationship between an international public management paradigm, as neo-managerialism was, and the peculiar characteristics of a national administrative system as shaped by its national history.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the prominence of the Italian administrative traditions over the paradigm of the New Public Management (NPM), which consistently inspired the administrative reforms of the last three decades.

To achieve this objective an appreciation of administrative history is essential (Raadschelders 2000; Painter and Peters 2010), and most of the works on this issue do not take it into account very much (Borgonovi and Ongaro 2010; Natalini 2006).

In particular detecting the characteristics of the Italian administrative traditions seems particularly important for future reforms and to adapt Italian public administration properly to global trends and policies in public management. Indeed, the past has shown us which are the peculiarities and the persistences of the Italian administrative system and what has failed and why.

In this paper I assume that administrative traditions are components of a more encompassing state traditions (Painter and Peters 2010). The public bureaucracy is a central institution for the State and the ability of the State to implement its policies is central to its capacity. Therefore, there is a continuous interaction between the manner in which the State is defined as an entity and the nature of the bureaucracy that serves the State, the public servants who fill the position within bureaucracy, and the style of public policy implementation. Consequently, the relationship with civil society and the institutional culture played a very important role in shaping the dominant state traditions (Dyson 1980). At the most abstract level this relationship reflects the logic of the emergence of the State historically and patterns of social thought that were central to the State formations. Thus, in this research on the Italian administrative traditions and their relationship with New Public Management (NPM) I will use an approach based on State traditions and patterns of governance.

In the first part of the paper I analyze the Southern European administrative traditions, in which Italy might be included, and the history of the Italian central bureaucracy before the Second World War, enhancing the sedimentation of the administrative traditions that will have shaped the characteristics of the civil service later on; in the second part I offer a historical picture of the Italian civil service from post-war golden age to 1980s crisis; in the third I look at administrative reforms of the 1990s and 2000s, highlighting the impact of the NPM on the Italian administrative system; and in the conclusions I outline the historical ‘persistences’ that have characterised the “Italian style” in public administration and how they have shaped the administrative organisation and the policy paradigm of the Italian civil service.

2. States and administrative traditions: a Southern European family?

In terms of administrative traditions Italy can be considered, albeit its own peculiarities, as part of the Southern Europe family. Considering the peculiar development of the State and society of Southern European nations it is possible to identify the rise of a “model” or “family” of bureaucracy (Sotiropoulos 2004). The model has common and persistent characteristics between the administrative systems of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece which deserves to be analyzed to put Italy into a wider picture. There four variables to consider: a) formal legalism, b) extensive political patronage, c) clientelism from below and d) lack of administrative élite.

These variables has to be contextualized with some broader consideration on the model of the Southern European states. Here the state has “assisted” the development of capitalism for a longer time and to a larger extent compared with other European capitalist economies. It has traditionally promoted economic development through patronage of certain industrial sectors and business interests. Furthermore the state has developed a peculiar form of social welfare. Traditionally in Southern Europe social protection was hinged on the family, the Church and voluntary associations. The welfare

state developed somewhat slowly after the second world war. The Southern European model involves generosity of the state towards certain categories (e.g. public employees, professionals, assisted capitalists), universal public health service; public occupationally-based social insurance schemes; selective provision of subsidies by the state, often on the basis of patronage; use of public sector as a 'social shock absorber' (Spence 2000:135).

Within this model of state it was developed the modern public administration and its traditions, which remained influenced by the elements described above.

Formal legalism is a very influential variable, particularly for the Italian administrative system.

The actions of the modern state bureaucracies are bounded on the basis of the principle of legality. However, in the Southern European states this principle is in an excessive and fragmented manner which has led to an over-production of laws and decrees. Regulatory over-production is linked with legalism, the tendency to view things through juridical lens and to address all new political and social problems by resorting to the passage of new legislation or amendments to existing one. Legalism, in turn, is probably associated with formalism, i.e., with a larger than usual discrepancy between what the law stipulates and what really happens. Moreover, this tendency towards establishing detailed, formal regulations is accompanied by a desire to satisfy small sectoral interests through the passage of convenient legislation. Laws and decrees accommodate such interests but, as a consequence, also subject equivalent interests to unequal treatment. Examples include state-subsidized business companies, local networks of politicians, civil servants and businessmen as well as trade unions of the wider public sector. Some of these collective actors have succeeded in carving out a particularistic legal framework, suitable to their sectoral interests, thus adding up to the plethora of regulations and the contradictions of the legislation.

A second characteristic of the Southern European states is political clientelism in the civil service, which implies an hard politicization of top level bureaucrats. By referring to the 'top', I mean the higher echelons of ministries and public enterprises. After each government turnover, a large and often fluctuating number of top administrative posts are filled by appointees of the governing elite. These appointees are not necessarily civil servants. But even in the top posts reserved for career civil servants, there is apparent political party intervention. The distinctive aspect of South European politicization is that political intervention from above can sometimes reach down to the middle ranks of the civil service hierarchy and out to a large number of public corporations.

To the politicization of the top corresponds clientelism in the lower ranks.

In this case we can define this practice as 'clientelism' which means: recruitment of employees at the lower levels and in-service transfers on the basis of particularistic criteria, such as political party affiliation. These two distinct levels of clientelism have always been extensive and inter-linked. Indeed, it is difficult to obtain a meritocratic and effective higher civil service if the members of the lower civil service are recruited and promoted on the grounds of clientelistic criteria.

In the case of a wide clientelism form below the public sector is used as a 'social shock absorber'. Indeed, through the intermediation of parties, the public sector used to fulfill a well-known social function in Southern Europe. This was the function of alleviating social pressures 'from below', from unemployed, unemployable or professionally insecure social categories of the population. Re-

levant examples included graduates of law and political science faculties, high-school graduates without university education and internal migrants. The function consisted in offering them job opportunities in the public sector, during periods of rising unemployment or just before the conduct of general elections.

To conclude on clientelism what distinguishes South European public sectors from those of the rest of Western Europe was a different relation with society. This is a well-known relation explored by many analysts of individual South European societies (e.g., Graziano 1978 on Italy, Mouzelis 1986 on Greece). In broader terms, the public sector in Southern Europe used to constitute a desirable outlet for large segments of the active labour force, and more precisely for the petty bourgeoisie and the middle class. Such pressures 'from below' were compounded by a specific political party function undertook to channel and to stabilize political consensus.

The fourth characteristic is that in the Southern European bureaucracy there is no such thing as a typical European administrative elite (Cassese 1993: 336, Sotiropoulos 1993). The traditional *esprit de corps* of the senior civil servants lacks in Southern European bureaucracies. Moreover, there is not a tradition of *grand écoles*, as the ENA in France or Oxbridge system in the United Kingdom, for recruiting and training the next administrative élite. Political networking and personal connections are in general more important than top-level education in developing a successful administrative career. Consequently the lack of such a tradition has led many civil servants to become very skillful at using party and union ties, in order to protect and promote their careers and administrative roles.

In the end, there are two other aspects to consider, in broader terms, which substantially have influenced the reforms of Southern European bureaucracies in the last three decades: the EU and the New Public Management paradigm.

In the last years European Union played an important role in designing administrative reforms. The EU offered externally induced pressure on the South European bureaucracies and also became a source for inspiration for domestic pressures towards administrative reform: the modernizing political elites of Southern Europe used the prospect of integration into the EU as a political weapon to press for change in their states and societies. The case of Italy where technocratic elites played a pivotal role in the country's monetary integration with the EU was typical in that respect (Dyson and Featherstone 1996). Generally, the effect of all this was the multiplication of administrative structures which appeared in various forms: first, in the form of new units (secretariats, divisions or sections of ministries) responsible for relations with the EU; second, in the form of task forces and ad hoc committees of experts entrusted with the tasks relevant to European integration; and third, in the form of new public agencies created on the side of ministries, in order to avoid the rigid hierarchy and cumbersome procedures of the central public administration. However, changes owed to Europeanization, without being cosmetic, have not been structural either.

Indeed, the ideas of 'New Public Management' (NPM) have not been applied consistently in the bureaucracies of Southern Europe. Despite politicians and academics of these countries has been conquered by neomanagerial rhetoric and policies, changes had been cosmetic at civil service level (Clark 2000: 25). Such ideas became popular among Southern European countries as in any other

Western democracy, but the reforms got poor results. These ideas did not add up to a recasting of South European bureaucracies, as we will show below examining the Italian case, precisely because of their administrative traditions. Probably the most relevant idea of the NPM paradigm in the Southern European states has been the one referred to the retreat of the state from its practice of social and economic interventionism (Mueller and Wright 1994) producing a wave of privatizations in the nineties (particularly in Italy).

To sum up southern European bureaucracies have probably shown extensive politicisation of their higher echelons and political patronage in regard to recruitment of civil service personnel. Those bureaucracies, especially in the lowest ranks, have also used to function as a 'safety valve' in times of rising unemployment. As a consequence this practice has produced a low skills bureaucrats and a weak meritocratic system. Other distinguishing traits of South European bureaucracies were formalism and legalism; over-production and fragmentation of regulations; relatively large discrepancies between formal regulations and common, actual practices and, finally, lack of a substantial administrative elite combined with a periodically strong trade union movement in the wider public sector. The EU has produced some structural changes but without aligning these bureaucracies to the ones of the central and northern Europe while the NPM was mostly a rhetoric expedient and a cosmetic reform programme which did not recast the administrative systems of these nations. Taken together, the above traits may consist a loose, 'model' or 'family' of South European bureaucracy, allowing for variations from one country to the other.

Italy fits with all the characteristics of Southern European bureaucratic family we have analyzed above. Within this framework, the Italian administrative system has its own peculiarities which derive from its political history and its State-building process. And it is time to look at them now.

3. Within the origins of the State: the history of the Italian civil service before the post-war Constitution.

Over the more than 150 years since the unification of the country, many changes have occurred in the Italian political system (constitutional monarchy, mass democracy, fascism, democratic Republic). Compared with these enormous changes, the administrative system has remained relatively insulated from the political domain, in the double sense of its connections with the latter and of being tempted to exert a political role itself (Lewansky 2000).

The first significant administrative reform dates back to the Piedmont reign in 1853 when a law separated political role and administrative role. The ministers, political personnel, were directly appointed by the King. They were in charge of directing public administration and taking care of both policy-making and implementation, and they were solely accountable to Parliament for their activities. This model established a *Segretario Generale*, generally a political man who acted as a bridge between the minister and the bureaucracy (Cassese 1983, 28–9). Civil servants were directed by both ministers and the secretary general.

At the beginning of the twentieth century another position was created to coordinate political and administrative power, the *Direttore Generale* (General Director), which became an increasingly independent and less political role, at least in appearances. However, despite the innovation introduced by the 1853 law, the administrative and political elites remained very close to each other. Personal ties and political membership were used as tools to occupy higher echelons of the administrative system.

The functions of the administration began growing in complexity beginning in the 1880s, and a process of professionalisation was set up; new and more qualified civil servants were required: doctors, geographers, statisticians, engineers, accountants and lawyers. In 1882 the *Genio Civile* was created, a civilian engineering corps inspired by military administration and by the French model of the technical grand corps. The statistical service represented another example of these attempts to professionalise the bureaucracy of the young Italian State (Melis 1996). Until the end of the nineteenth century public administration was still permeated by organisational theory, which exerted some influence on the training of civil servants. In this period Italian bureaucracy still had a professional orientation and a dedication to efficient and effective organisation (Lewansky 2000).

It was with the new century that the influence of legal theory founded by V. E. Orlando in the 1880s made the legalistic paradigm predominant in Italian public administration (Dente 1988). A law degree was required to access the higher civil service. The activity of the public administration was completely legalised through the notion of ‘administrative act’ (Melis 1996, 13). Technical careers lost importance and influence, and civil servants became interpreters of laws and regulations. The system established in the 1860s with the creation of the account bodies such as the *Corte dei Conti* and *Ragioneria Generale dello Stato* implemented this legalistic approach through the principle of the formal legitimacy of decisions. In this period legalism became the dominant characteristic of the Italian administrative system. As Dente (1988, 5) argues, ‘Administrative law—based on procedural legitimacy, pervasiveness of preventive controls, uniform interpretation of provisions, distribution of tasks by law, lack of discretion—actually is Italian administrative culture.’ Both the political and administrative posts were a ‘monopoly by jurists’ (Guarnieri 1988). Italian bureaucrats considered their job as applying and interpreting precisely laws and regulations and not as obtaining results (Putnam 1975). Thus policies which found the opposition by civil servants were sabotaged, creating implementation problems and failures. Indeed, the legalistic culture constituted an effective protection that allows civil servants to defend themselves from intrusions from the outside and in a way to strengthen their positioning.

The growing dimensions of ministries and the new legislation, established in 1908, which aimed to protect public employees against the interferences from the political sphere made it increasingly difficult for the ministers to overcome obstacles to organise administrative machine and to direct the personnel they were in charge of. The policy “security (of tenured post) in return for less power” between civil service and politics began. The government provided guarantees and long-life jobs to civil servants but it excluded them from the most of decision and policy-making process.

During the Fascist regime politics and administration remained substantially separated. The regime aimed to select civil servants who did not oppose it. The political executive became dominant and

prominent in policy-making, and the civil service was subordinated to it, but the party's ideology did not colonise the administration. This independence was guaranteed by the Crown and by the conception of the administration as politically neutral, shared by documents of the *Consiglio di Stato*, a liberal ideology institution (Guarnieri 1988, 75). The regime imposed a compulsory membership to the party for every civil servant, but this rule did not imply a real selection of those who ideologically supported fascism (Guarnieri 1988, 76). The hierarchical organisation of regime was empowered in 1923 by the De Stefani reform. The regime won a consensus among civil servants by offering stability and status, the latter fed up with the 'absolute State' rhetoric and theory. This policy for the civil service, namely 'few powers and many guarantees' (Cassese 1984, 37), will have been applied even further during the Republic and used as one of the techniques to maintain the prominence of political parties over public administration in policy-making process.

During the Fascist era, regime's hierarchies developed very much parallel administrations, which were entities separated from both the central and local administrative body which managed socio-economic policies. Here the situation differed. For parallel administrations, which operated in the welfare and industrial fields, a political spoils system was applied to remunerate the regime's friends, but these economic-financial agencies, such as IMI and IRI, were often led by managers coming from the private sector and staffed by highly specialised technocrats. These parallel entities survived to the end of the regime and they were used even by the politicians of the Republic as a tank for clientelistic practices at lower ranks and, at the highest echelons, as a tool to attract the best public managers, who preferred to join these then State-owned companies rather than traditional civil service both for better pay and more prestige.

The Fascist period might be considered as a path-breaking moment for the Italian State in which the relationships between the political and the bureaucratic systems begun to be based on mutual non-interference in each other's functions. The maintenance of a certain level of autonomy from the regime by the public administration fostered the idea that bureaucracy represented the core of the state, whatever the political regime of the moment might be (Guarnieri, 1988).

3.1. Post-war Italy: state structure and administrative system

After the WWII defeat and civil war, Italy drafted a new Constitution that was approved in 1948.

The 1948 Constitution accepts the parliamentary model, according to which the administration is an organisation that serves the government, which is put in charge and responsible for them. The Constitution then established two constitutional principles for public administration at the articles 97 and 98. In these articles it is established that first the fundamental principle of the public administration is impartiality, and they contain norms that aim at avoiding the political influence induced by the presence of the government at the top of the administration. Second, it is written that 'civil servants are in the exclusive service of the nation'. They served the Republic and not the parties in charge of government.

Furthermore, the Constitution of 1948 aimed to decentralise the historically centralised and hierarchical model creating a decentralised (regionalised) unitary state. The creation of the 20 Regions prescribed by the Constitution, five regions with 'special statute' and 15 with 'ordinary statute', remained to a large extent unrealised until the 1970s. Furthermore, the persistence of the hierarchical and centralised structure has remained evident in the central ministries in Rome and their sub-national administrative units, in particular at the level of the 109 provinces. For the latter, a key role was played by *Prefettura* (prefectures), which were established historically from the French department structure, as well as the *prefetti* appointed by and hierarchically subordinate to central government. Moreover, the strong organisational and functional importance which central government still has in the sub-national areas is expressed by the fact that even today more than 55 per cent of the entire public personnel force are employed by the State rather than by local government levels (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014).

3. A new Republican administration: continuity and changes from the 1950s to the 1970s

The reforms, especially at legislative level, in the post-war period were considerable. Following the historical periodisation made by Cassese (1984), we can identify four different reforms from the 50s to the 70s. From a historical point of view we might consider this era as the golden age for the Italian civil service which was related to the Italian's economic miracle of the fifties and sixties.

The first is the regulation of the administrative class, articulated in career levels. In 1954 decree no. 1181 of 20 December 1954 delegated the government to legislate on the civil service, and with a following decree this reform became effective. This law established new guarantees for civil service job posts.

The second reform established, among civil servants of the administrative class, a higher category called 'dirigenza' (managerial level) and it was subdivided into five levels, of which only three could be found in all the ministries (primo dirigente, dirigente superiore, dirigente generale).

The 1972 decree assigned to the senior civil service, and in particular to the directors general, autonomous powers of supervision and coordination, decision-making and control. These duties had to be fulfilled within the guidelines set by the minister, based on lists of acts to be presented by the senior civil servants to the minister. The minister could then overrule, amend or reform the acts of directors general.

A third change regards human resources and turnover. Indeed, with the 1972 reform of the 'dirigenza' and with law no. 335 of 14 August 1974 the 'voluntary leave' from the civil service was stimulated with a retire-in-advance policy. Important economic incentives of various types were launched, such as a pension higher than the last salary received, in order to induce civil servants to retire in advance. These regulations had a great impact on the public administration. In fact, a wide process of personnel renewal was undertaken in the 1970s. Robert Putnam (1970) calculated that 95 per cent of the Italian civil servants who had entered the civil service before the Second World War, by the end of the 70s, would have entirely retired.

The fourth and last reform of this period was a new institutional relationship between the Parliament and the civil service, which led to a great opening of the public administration to the outside. Indeed, parliamentary regulations were emended to provide for the hearing of higher civil servants by Parliamentary Committees. This was a sign of the crisis of ministerial responsibility, of the weaknesses of the governments owing to political instability compared with the continuity and the 'ossification' in the higher echelons of the public administration (Cassese, 1999).

However, these changes did not transform the model of relations between politics and the civil service. In the post-1945 period, the Italian administrative-political system has been shaped by the influence of political parties. One sign of this control is that the weakness and instability of governments have always been determined by the control of parties' secretariats over the executive power. The turnover in human resources did not change this model. Indeed, beyond the physical structure, there was a continuity owing to the common territorial origin; as Cassese underlined in the 1960s the number of southerners within the senior ranks of the civil service rose to 84 per cent, and to preserve an old and gerontocratic model in the career's framework. Furthermore, the two main policies of the 1970s (*exodus* and *dirigenza*) could be seen in two very different ways (Cassese 1984, 44). On the one hand, these measures marked the reaction of the political class against a civil service which, by the 1960s, advocated for an acceleration of the administrative process of decision and of public expenditure. On the other hand they can be interpreted as a compensation policy, chosen by the political class through the higher civil service, which had been 'hollowed out' of a considerable number of competencies with the creation of the regions (1970). Hence, party patronage provided the long-life tenured post for loyal followers. Although entrance into the civil service is officially regulated via formal examinations, the majority of new civil servants did not pass that formal route, but a political one based on electoral loyalty.

Furthermore, all these reforms found some implementation failures, occurred particularly in the 1970s.

Indeed, higher civil servants had never made use of the autonomous powers assigned to them. On the one hand, senior officials preferred not to take responsibility for autonomous acts to be submitted to the minister. On the other hand, laws continued to provide for a majority of decisions to be taken through ministerial decrees. Moreover, ministers' private staff continued to expand their prerogatives and to invade the sphere of competence of the civil service.

A similar failure characterised the new human resource management. In 1978 (six years after the redefinition of senior civil servants' career) there were made some attempts to set up the Advanced School for Public Administration, but the envisaged competitive entry and training periods were quickly replaced by short non-competitive training courses under the management of individual ministries. Competitive selection based on merit was never applied, and the old method of promotion linked to length of service was continued (Melis 1996). Moreover, the provisions for external recruitment were never implemented. (Cassese, 1999, 61).

3.1. The 1980s: an age of missed opportunities

The 1980s can be considered as an age of missed opportunities. In 1979 the most prominent public administration scholar in Italy, Massimo Severo Giannini, at the time Minister for Public Service, drafted a report named 'Rapporto sui principali problemi dell'Amministrazione dello Stato'¹, which was then presented to a special parliamentary committee for administrative reforms.

The proposals made by Giannini aimed to change substantially the Italian civil service with a wide plan of privatisations, agencification, better coordination in central government, organisation and planning, contractualisation of public servants, introduction of productivity and performance indicators.

The Report was never implemented by the political executive and Professor Giannini was dismissed as minister by the following Government settled in 1980.

This decade was characterised by many important studies in the field of public administration made within institutions: *Rapporto Giannini* in 1979, CNR's project on the organisation and functioning of public administration in 1985 and a study on the organisation of ministries made by Formez². However, in practical terms there had not been any advancement for the modernisation of the Italian civil service and the old vices of administrative system resurfaced stronger than ever.

Indeed, the number of public employees increased substantially and the number of senior civil servants grew to 7,400, the highest in Europe. Most of these new public servants were selected through patronage and clientelistic practices and not by a meritocratic examination.

Moreover, during this period there was a massive clientelism as Sabino Cassese writes, 'it can be estimated that, in 1973-90, about 350,000 people were recruited without entrance exams, and then had their posts made permanent by 12 special laws. In the same period, in the same administration, about 250,000 people were recruited through regular exams. It seems therefore that titularisation is the predominant way of entry into the civil service'³ (Cassese 1993, 325). The public sector was used to provide a social function. This was the function of alleviating social pressures 'from below', from unemployed or insecure social categories of the population. (Sotiropoulos 2004, 36).

Moreover, in the 1980s it was strengthened the role of the Presidenza del Consiglio. The employees in Palazzo Chigi were 63 in 1948, 300 in 1963 and they grew up to 800 in 1980. Between 1981 and 1988 the Presidenza was reorganized and new departments and offices were created. This transformation was definitely confirmed by the legislative decree 400/1988 which strengthened the coordinating role of the President in the Cabinet and it established new departments and sub-governmental offices. With the 400/1988 decree policy-making became more centralized into the Presidenza del Consiglio and, particularly, in the hands of Palazzo Chigi's staff and top grade civil servants.

¹ Giannini M.S., 'Rapporto sui principali problemi dell'Amministrazione dello Stato', send to Parliament on 16 November 1979.

² Formez is a public entity, a think-tank established by central government.

³ Titularisation involves hiring personnel to meet temporary labour shortages in the public sector and then granting this temporary personnel the status of civil servant or its equivalent (i.e., permanent job contracts)

Along this measure it was undertaken a broader rationalization of ministries and departments. In particular the Presidents of the 1980s aimed to eliminate the duplication of functions, to establish a clearer division of competences among departments and to sharply separate line and staff personnel. Concerning the professionalization of the civil servants, proposed by Gannini's report of 1979, severe delays were occurring. Consequently the number of civil servants who were involved in training programme was really low: only 14,000 on more than 3 millions of public employees.

In the end we might consider the 1980s as a decade of missed opportunities. The more substantial effort to reorganize the Italian civil service, the Giannini's report, was not implemented and its recommendations were discarded both by politicians and higher civil servants. Only the recommendation of the Report which concerned the reorganization and rationalization of pay grades was achieved. Some changes occurred in the organization of ministries and departments but there sounded like mere maquillage operations. The only innovation was the real strengthening of the coordinating role of the Presidenza del Consiglio, particularly at policy-making level. Concerning manpower the government failed to reduce numbers of public employees, to make civil servants more productive and to establish a comprehensive training system. Moreover, technological innovation suffered for organizational and training shortcomings.

In conclusion despite some attempts to modernize public administration at the end of the 1980s the Italian civil service appeared to be one of the greatest weaknesses of the country. Lack of organisation, very low productivity, slowness in decision-making, poor policy implementation and high risk of corruption characterised the Italian bureaucracy at the beginning of the 1990s.

4. The reforms of the 1990s: Cassese's project to strengthen responsibility and efficiency in the civil service. An Italian way to New Public Management?

Italy entered a phase of continuing political and policy change following the biennium 1991–2, when the party system started to collapse (Bull and Rhodes 1997; Ongaro 2009; Radaelli and Franchino 2004), and the criminal investigations for corruption and illegal finances of political parties, named 'Mani Pulite' and led by a pool of magistrates in Milan, exploded.

At the dawn of the nineties the Italian public administration was placed under pressure both by the public, who demanded 'less corruption and more efficiency' in the political system as a consequence of Mani Pulite's criminal investigations, and by the Europeanisation of public policies (Cassese 2004; Knill 2001) which imposed more fiscal budget discipline for national governments and new rules from above to implement for law-makers and civil servants. Furthermore, the widespread paradigm of New Public Management suggests the use of the following instruments: privatization; a growing emphasis on the citizen as client; de-centralization; strategic planning and management; the creation of a competitive environment; the measurement of results; contracting out; public service management flexibility; the use of innovative accounting methods; personnel management based on wage incentives; the use of tariffs; the separation of politics from administration; financial

efficiency; the considerable use of computer technologies (Hood 1991; Peters 1997; Lane 2000; Barzelay 2001). The Italian policy-makers aimed to adopt NPM paradigm too (Bassanini 2000c).

These dynamics of the politico-administrative system produced over the 1990s and the 2000s a number of substantial reforms that deeply reshaped the civil service.

A new season of reforms started when in 1993 a new reform package was initiated and promulgated under the Amato government and put into effect during the technocratic government led by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. The reform was envisaged and supervised by Sabino Cassese, the then Minister for Public Administration and one of the most prominent Italian scholar of public law⁴.

The reform made advances with respect to the definition of powers of senior officials. The decree envisaged that the government should set the objectives and the programmes and verify the results and effectiveness of the actions of the administration with reference to the general guidelines. Senior civil servants were given responsibility for the technical, financial and administrative implementation of all guidelines, including all decisions which involved contact between the administration and the outside world. Senior officials had autonomous powers over resources, personnel and control. They became responsible for policy implementation and its results. It followed that, on the basis of the 1993 reform, senior officials had more control over expenditure, the management of personnel and employees.

The principal aim of the reform package was the introduction of separation between the 'managerial sphere' and the 'political sphere': the paradigmatic model became one in which the political level (e.g. ministries) established the objectives of the administration, allocated the resources and evaluated 'the efficacy of the results achieved by managers' with the assistance of specialised advisory bodies, while managers were in charge of making all the decisions about the utilisation of resources for achieving the chosen objectives (Cassese 1999).

In exchange for this decisive shift of powers in favour of the senior civil service, the law promoted two other fundamental changes: on the one hand, a strong reduction in the number of top officials by 10 per cent and, on the other, the introduction of competitive training courses and exams. The training courses was to be open to all those passing an initial competition; there was to be an intermediate examination followed by a six-month internship in the public or private administration, leading to a final competition.

This second reform was not implemented and the number of senior civil servants did not decrease. The new powers conferred by reform to higher civil servants were not used, and directors general preferred not to take full responsibility for the management of their departments, especially as a result of the increase in the ex-ante control through the *Corte dei Conti*, a protection which many directors general would want reinstated. And, in this context, their concerns could be linked with the growing dynamism of magistrates: embezzlement charges in Italy amounted to approximately 450 a year until 1989 and climbed to more than 1,000 a year since 1991; extortion charges amounted to 100 a year until 1989 and up to 500 since 1992; corruption charges, which were fewer than 100 a year until 1991, remained over 400 since then; and charges for abuse of authority numbered bet-

⁴ The first action made by Cassese as Minister for Public Administration was the publication of the report "Rapporto sulle condizioni della Pubblica Amministrazioni", Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica, 1993 which pointed out deficiencies and weaknesses of the Italian civil service.

ween 6,000 and 10,000 since 1992⁵. Faced with such an aggressive stance on the part of magistrates, senior officials retreated into a defensive position, avoiding the assumption of new powers and responsibility. As far as open competition is concerned, by late 1997 only one competition procedure to select new civil servants had been initiated.

However, the reform produced some major changes: the overarching transformation was that public employment became subject to the general rules of private employment. From a juridical point of view, managers were no longer appointed on the basis of an administrative law act, but were ‘accepting a hiring proposal’, exactly in the same way as their private sector colleagues do.

As a consequence of the privatisation of the public employment, labour contracts, negotiated between the government in its capacity as the employer (operating through an agency called ARAN) and the unions, became a major source of regulation of the civil service.

Furthermore, performance-related pay was introduced, and managers could be removed as a result of poor performance. Managerial levels were reshaped through the introduction of only one major distinction between the top officials, *dirigenti generali*, or ‘general managers’, and *dirigenti*, all the other public managers, that had a partly different regulation prior to these reforms. Previously, there were three levels of organisation of managers in the Italian public sector, with only the managers in the upper tier enabled to occupy the top positions in the organisational pyramid.

As we have written previously, only a part of the reform package of the 1990s was implemented, while a large part of it (particularly performance evaluation and competitive training) was abandoned. The reasons for this failure were multiple (administrative traditions, legalistic culture, institutional confusion, political instability), but, as the Minister Sabino Cassese argued there was a *fil rouge* running through all of them: ‘The answer lies not so much in the higher civil service as in the echelons below it: it is these groups which oppose any reform attempt, fearing a reduction of their career prospects without any accompanying benefits. In other words, the trade-off contained in the reforms remains asymmetrical. It gives more powers to the bureaucracy in exchange for mobility. But the benefit is to the advantage of senior officials, while the burden lies on the shoulders of middle-rank categories, those of directors, who have cultivated hopes of promotion and oppose any interference of merit over age and years of service. This asymmetry explains why the reforms remain blocked’ (Cassese, 1999, 65).

4.1. Between the old and new century: Bassanini’s reforms and the resilience of administrative traditions

A second major reform occurred in 1998, under the centre-left government. The initiative was inspired by the rise of the “Second Republic” where “political bipolarism”, that meant alternation in government between center-left and center-right coalitions, was established and it offered a window of opportunity to reform public administration. Indeed, this new institutional framework, that developed after the collapse of the old political parties system in 1992 and the new majoritarian law of 1993, ensured more political stability governments and, by consequence, it shaped a new dynamic

⁵ Data reported by Cassese (1999: 60).

between the executive and central bureaucracy. In this context, Franco Bassanini, a jurist and then Minister for Public Administration for center-left governments (1996-2001), envisaged a reform which aimed to build a new relationship between politics and civil servants and to modernize public services.

The reform package⁶ introduced a form of ‘spoils system’, restrained only to top-level positions⁷. Another major change regarded managerial appointments, that all became temporary (ranging between a minimum of two and a maximum of seven years), with confirmation of the incumbent in principal subject to an appraisal of the performance of the manager in his/her position.

It was also made easier to appoint managers picked from outside the administration, be they non-career civil servants picked from the private sector or the academia, or officials seconded from other administrations—a practice that was already spreading at the local level⁸, though a ceiling to the total number of non-career civil servants holding a managerial position was defined⁹; also for the lower ranks, new flexible contractual arrangements for the employment of personnel were introduced, completing, after more than twenty years, the bulk of the reforms proposed by Giannini.

The reform of central administration aimed at ‘merging bodies with similar missions; eliminating duplication and segmentation’ (Bassanini, 2000b, 11); a ‘more flexible internal organisation’ with ‘freedom to choose between organisational models’ (Bassanini, 2000b, 11); the presence ‘of just one ministry for each mission: 22 ministries in 1990, 18 today, 12 in the year 2001’; and the creation of numerous agencies, that is, ‘company-like technical–operative structures’ (Bassanini 2000b, 11).

In 1993, an agencification process was set up¹⁰. However, the reform had implementation problems. Just few agencies among those laid down by the Government were effectively established. The creation of other agencies was hindered by higher civil service itself, who refused to hive off some functions to semiautonomous administrative bodies. Furthermore, the agencies set up remained much more similar, in their organisation and functions, to a ministerial department rather than to a ‘company-like technical–operative structure’.

The reform of public sector employment aimed to complete the privatisation of the working relationship and the further emphasising of the separation of politics from administration. With regard to the first of these two changes, collective bargaining was extended to virtually all public sector employees¹¹, with even the rules regarding the careers of public employees being defined by employment contracts. As far as the second of the two features characterising public sector reform is

⁶ Outlined in the Legislative decree 80/1998

⁷ 55 top executive positions, whose incumbents could be replaced within 90 days following a vote of confidence for the new government

⁸ Some mayors introduced the figure of the ‘director general’, or city manager, appointed on a private law contractual basis.

⁹ In the central government, the ceiling was 5 per cent as a proportion of the total number of public managers.

¹⁰ Legislative Decree 300/1999.

¹¹ Only small groups of individuals, such as university lecturers and professors, prefects and members of the armed forces, were excluded.

concerned, the legal foundations of the separation of powers were further strengthened: it is now the duty of politicians to ‘define policies and strategies, assess results, appoint general directors but to have no further direct involvement in administration’, whereas administrative directors and managers ‘are given broader powers but also greater responsibility, and higher salaries linked to results and performance’ (Bassanini, 2000a,16).

The aim of the reform was to transform public administration into a sector that ‘serves the citizen–user’ (Bassanini 2000b,18). This is to be accomplished by means of a ‘cultural revolution’ based on ‘the quality of the service provided and on customer satisfaction’ and ‘on a new form of control of performance, together with more efficient, less invasive, checks on legitimacy’. This policy was accompanied by the promotion of ‘the professional betterment of public employees to be achieved through the introduction of an extraordinary training programme’ (Bassanini 2000b, 18). This modification of the institutional objectives of Italian public administration, from a form of administration in which only the rules and procedures matter for anything to a performance-oriented administration, was set up through the use of the following instruments: the temporary nature of managerial posts and the ‘firing of incapable managers’; ‘performance-weighted salaries’; a thorough system of internal controls (strategic management and managerial accounting); citizens’ charters (Bassanini, 2000b:19). In conclusion the reform package was pervaded by NPM-style concepts and rhetoric.

Other changes were introduced over the period 2001–2 by the second Berlusconi government, with Law 145/2002 on the regulation of personnel in the central government. Some of these provisions further strengthened, to some extent ‘stretched’ up to the limit, provisions contained in previous reforms (Borgonovo and Ongaro 2010, 114). The most important intervention was the extension of the spoils system: it was established that the higher civil service appointments lapsed by default with the beginning of the new legislature¹². Other influential interventions concerned the repeal of the minimum length of the appointment of managers¹³, which meant that some managers were appointed to a role for just a few months, subject to renewal. With this provision, a new form of job precariousness, totally unknown to civil servants in Italy, was introduced creating an ‘acephalous’ civil service (Cassese 2014; Melis 2015); even the proportion of the managerial positions that could awarded to non-tenured officials, hired from outside the administration, was enforced by law: the cap was set at 10 per cent for top executives and 8 per cent for the other managers.

As far as human resource management concerned after the Bassanini reform, only staff with a seniority of some years in the public sector could apply for a tenured managerial position, the only alternative way of access to the managerial roles in the public sector for ‘outsiders’ being the *corso-concorso*, the competitive-entry course whose graduates have direct access to the managerial role after completion of the course and a final examination.

A series of negative outcomes affected Bassanini’s reforms. For example, the collective bargaining of conditions of employment became an instrument guaranteeing the rights and privileges of employees, rather than an instrument of human resources management (Bordogna 2002; Capano

¹² Before Law 145/2002, the appointments’ renewal hinged on the decision taken by the new Minister within 90 days of the election of the Government.

¹³ Legislative Decree 80/1998 previously set the minimum length of two years.

1998); the privatisation of public employees' contracts was never completed, remaining a hybrid system. The figures for this are somewhat baffling: during the contractual period 1997–2001, 60 per cent of Italian public administrations used the seniority criterion as the most relevant for the promotion of employees; this percentage increases to 90 per cent in the case of the central ministries (Bordogna 2002). Furthermore, the evaluation of the performance of management and employees became a way of distributing money, rather than a management tool designed to encourage learning (Bonaretti and Codara 2001; Corte dei Conti 2001); in the ministries, for example, only 30 per cent of employees and 44 per cent of managers had their performance formally assessed (Bordogna 2002). The citizens' charters became only a symbolic expression of good intent, and not a manual of fair conduct for organisations with respect to their own clients (Pasini 1999), and the majority of the public administration sector had not complied with the formal need for its own citizens' charter (Formez 2001).

Last of all, although the reform was devised in terms of introducing the economic and the measurable into the domains of bureaucracy and formal compliance, its legal articulation seemed to be informed by the very logic and ethos it was called upon to change (Panozzo 2000). At the dawn of the new century Italian government was still a "government by decree".

4.2. The experiment of Brunetta's Reform (2008–2010): a 're-regulation' from above.

A further reform was passed in 2009–10, promoted by the fourth Berlusconi government.

In 2008, after a wide electoral victory, the government launched a new comprehensive administrative reform projected by Mr Brunetta, Public Administration and Innovation Minister, and designed by the Legislative Decree 150/2009.

As a reaction to the weak effects of collective bargaining on productivity, the reform was meant to reduce the veto power of trade unions over public employment regulation. By introducing a new performance assessment system and linking additional wage benefits and performance results, the new reform also aimed to implement the performance management system, a key component of the previous waves of New Public Management-inspired reforms. Further, the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector had been closely linked to transparency as a key driver of reform, providing the public with open rough data on salaries, management of resources, and performance evaluations, as the evidence base for pressure against public administration malfunctioning (Natalini and Di Mascio 2015).

The objectives of Brunetta's reform included the strengthening of transparency, through measures such as the publication of payroll of public personnel on the webpage of the Public Administration Department; the redesigning of the system of controls to enhance public employees' accountability; and the re-launching of performance measurement in the public sector.

First, the Minister for Public Administration Brunetta launched a new public personnel policy (Law 133/2008) at the beginning of the new legislative period and he gained popularity by launching a crusade against the 'fannulloni' (slackers), widespread among the Italian public servants: tough

measures against absenteeism were introduced by reducing sick leave compensation and increasing monitoring practices.

In the same year (2008) the government launched a new comprehensive reform that was still under way when the effects of the economic downturn begun in 2008 became more serious, making it necessary to launch austerity measures.

The downsizing of the public workforce was pursued by means of the extension and tightening of the replacement rates already in place. After setting a cap on staff turnover in 2009 at 10% of employee terminations in 2008, for the period 2010–2013 the reduction of recruitment was set at 20% of the previous year's terminations, while in 2014 and 2015 the limit would increase respectively to 50% and 100%. This attempted sharp reduction in the actual staff numbers caused a continuous run-up of horizontal cuts in notional staff aimed at consolidating this result: Law Decree no. 112/2008 established a decrease in the number of managers (by 20% for first-level and by 15% for second-level managers), the unification of logistics offices, and the reduction by 10% of the spending for non-managerial personnel. Temporary workers were hit especially hard, as public organisations had their budget for fixed-term contracts slashed to 50% of the amount allocated in the year 2009 (Ongaro, Di Mascio et al. 2013, 21).

Brunetta's reform presented some modernising ideas, such as the overcoming of collective bargaining with unions to weaken the veto power of the latter and the improvement of performance management, and some weaknesses, such as the massive use of laws and regulations to establish a performance-related pay system and an exclusively top-down approach to complete the reform. Citizens and civil servants were not involved in policy design. Essentially the reform paid too much attention to legal rules rather than to organisational and cultural change within the offices of the civil service (Melis 2014). The reform brought about a 're-regulation from above', made through government legislative prerogatives (decrees). There were even some policy implementation failures, such as performance-related pay, which was not implemented owing to the lack of resources and the salary freeze imposed by the sovereign debt financial crisis. In 2012 only 129 on 14,000 public administrations had sent their performance and transparency plan to central government demonstrating how law was not sufficient to implement the reform. The evaluation system, made by independent bodies composed of politically appointed professionals and civil servants, did not work effectively: in 2012 more than 90% of the higher civil servants (*dirigenti*) were promoted with the highest mark and the highest merit pay level¹⁴. Performance assessment became a tool for redistributing additional money rather than to introduce a meritocratic system of pay-for-performance for civil servants. Considered these dysfunctions, it became natural that the most of the higher civil servants were appointed to their posts on the basis of political patronage and seniority rather than on performance evaluation. Furthermore, despite the emphasis on specialisation and the interdisciplinary approach to recruiting new civil servants promoted by the Minister, a law degree remained the main requirement for a civil service career. Then, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the legalistic doctrine continued to permeate administrative reforms and civil service organisation undermining the development of a real managerial attitude.

¹⁴ ANAC, 'Relazione sulla performance delle amministrazioni centrali 2012', Roma, published on February 2014.

5. Italy and NPM: a historical assessment

In the Italian administrative tradition contexts, NPM ideas were again differently framed and entrenched in the administrative systems (Bezes 2017).

As I showed before, political institutions and culture consistently has conditioned the development of NPM ideas. Using Hall's perspective (1993) on policy paradigm, Capano (2003) suggests that the institutionalization of the administrative law in Italy has shaped the diffusion and use of neo-managerial ideas and instruments. With a long-term perspective, Ongaro (2009) insists in how the politico-administrative 'context in motion' in Italy has been a dominant feature to understand public management reforms and the adoption of NPM ideas, with the highly unstable changes in the political system following the political crisis of 1992–1994.

Other scholars in Italy show that new performance management tools were introduced but they were soon hollowed out by new political pressures in the late 1990s and the sharp increase in political patronage under the second and third Berlusconi governments (2001–2006): political loyalty then replaced, or at least weakened, the use of performance evaluation in management as well as managerial autonomy (Di Mascio et al. 2011; Ongaro 2011; Di Mascio 2012). In the end, the attempt to managerialize the Italian civil service came along with a subsequent reinforcement of politicization under Berlusconi governments.

Beyond the 'national' adaptation, the legacy of performance management tools may also vary across sector-based ministries as analysed in the Italian case for ministries of interior, economics and finance, and transport (Arnaboldi and Palermo 2011).

Moreover, the personnel management reforms came first in the reform agenda, with the 1993 adoption of a private labour regulation for a majority of public agents, the creation of an agency in charge of professional relations and employment negotiations (ARAN), the nominal adoption of performance-related pay, a distinction between the political and administrative sphere and the institutionalization of a managerial level. It is revealing of how NPM paradigm have been accommodated to address what are perceived as predominant issues. Neo-managerial tools were initially used as a way to protect administration from the instability of politics and to enforce public budgets accountability. In this initial context as Mattei (2006) underlined the political turmoil of 1992–1994 served as a catalyst for radical policy change where the new executive reinterpretation of its function favoured the enactment of New Public Management-type reforms. However, administrative traditions has gradually toned down the managerial reforms undermining their implementation.

In more recent years, the relaunch of performance management in the form of a revitalization of performance-related pay, first introduced in the 1990s but since languishing, was undermined by the severe austerity measures taken since 2010 (Di Mascio et al. 2016). The post-2008 administrative reforms proved to be ineffective and they have been characterized by numerous implementation failures. The changes introduced by the last Berlusconi's government ended up with a "re-regulation from above" and with the predominance of a strong legalistic view.

In conclusion, from a historical standpoint, in the last two decades Italy aimed to introduce an anglo-american administrative paradigm - based on the separation between politics, policy and management and between policy-making and service-delivery - but hingeing it on the matrix of Napoleonic state tradition, which characterized Italian state-building process since the unification, where politics tends significantly to prevail over top-level bureaucrats, particularly at departmental level (Casini 2019).

One of the main causes of the failure of the NPM-inspired reforms in Italy it was the renunciation to introduce a real separation between politics and administration, both in terms of functions and organization. The hybridization of politics and administration has undermined administrative reforms because both politicians and senior civil servants remained primarily focused on patronage dynamics and political appointments rather than developing planning and managerial practices to make policy implementation and service delivery more effective.

6. Conclusions. Persistences and traditions in the Italian public administration

In the conclusions, it is worth focusing on ‘historical persistences’¹⁵ that have characterised the Italian civil service and shaped its administrative traditions. The history of the Italian public administration is permeated by a “dynamic conservatism” in its path of institutional change. Reform is possible but only adapting and recasting the new policies in the administrative traditions. The history of the Italian civil service demonstrates the resilience of these traditions and their capacity to influence and model the development of reforms. As the administrative historian Geoffrey Elton (1953) pointed out, revolutions in public administration are rare and continuity in values, practices and structures is a dominant trend in this field. This is true even for the Italian State, in which some characteristics have persisted from the creation of the unitary State until today.

- a) **Legalism and ineffective implementation.** The dominance of administrative law has not been undermined by the intense efforts of reformers during the last twenty-five years. The legal paradigm continues to represent the shared framework around which a cohesive and decidedly impermeable civil service developed. It has been developed through history by a policy community (politicians, public service employees, trade unionists, journalists and experts) that has shared the language and the legal perspective, with its fundamental values and its administrative culture, as well as the criterion for the eventual access of external participants: in order to become a member of the community, it has been necessary to demonstrate a knowledge of legal terminology, with all the socio-cultural implications this had (Capano 1992, 2000, 2003; Dente, 1999). The jurisdictional transformation of the state has been accompanied by the jurisdictional transformation of the way in which the actions of the public administration are viewed and judged. This extremely powerful process has traditionally prevented the establishment of those pre-conditions required for the birth of any alternative network supporting a rival paradigm, as

¹⁵ This concept of historical persistences, or regularities, was particularly developed by the Italian political scientist Gianfranco Miglio (1988). He analyzed recurrent political/institutional structures and behaviors through history that characterized a State or a political system.

for example the managerial one. The process of 'juridification' has been a self-nurturing phenomenon continuously at work throughout the history of the Italian administrative system. The fact that, during the implementation phase of the reforms, policy guidelines on reforms' instruments and strategies are all interpreted in ways that do not correspond to expectations is owing to the re-elaboration performed by the hegemonic paradigm and the theoretical coherence of the legal system. As Capano (2003) pointed out thanks to the discretionary nature of the interpretation, it enables those charged with the duty of implementing legislative innovations to normalise the real impact thereof. Thus new policies were recasted within a grounded cultural framework and moulded by administrative traditions. Indeed, the Italian civil service has absorbed the most radical and innovative reforms undermining them with a poor or inexistent organisational implementation. Furthermore, legal accountability continued to prevail over accountability based on economical effectiveness and efficiency. Administrative reforms have been translated by the law educated civil servants into their juridical language, as the reforms had to be framed in legislation (Kickert 2007). Economic management discourse was translated into legal discourse, diverting attention from policy implementation and results (Ongaro 2008). Administrative reforms have been reduced to laws and regulations, eliminating the phase of organizational change and performance audit. For the action of the hegemonic paradigm of legalism the gap between 'legal administration', what is written into the laws and the aims expressed by the legislator, and 'real administration', the administrative organisation and practices, remained wide. To conclude, the history of public administration in Italy can be seen as the history of the progressive institutionalization of a hegemonic tradition which, alongside the jurisdictional foundation of the nation-state, was based upon administrative law (Capano, 2003).

- b) **The lack of high-level civil service training.** The attempts to set up an Advanced School for Public Administration to train higher civil servants failed. Italian governments being trapped into an administrative traditions of politicization on top and clientelism from below and they did not succeed in establishing an effective process to increase the professionalization of the public servants, particularly top-executives. Furthermore, the preeminent model of civil service training has remained obsolete and based on juridical studies. Civil servants have remained more focused on formal accounting procedures than on managerial and operative practices. The difficulties in attracting talented and skilled persons who can work and grow into the civil service have not been overcome by the age of administrative reforms of 1990s and 2000s. Hiring restrictions imposed on the public sector after the financial crisis of 2009 contributed to strengthen this trend.
- c) **The unsolved relationship between politics and administration.** As we have seen, the separation began with the twentieth century and it continued during Fascism, even if the regime's control over civil servants was tighter. During the First Republic the dominance of politics over administration was evident: political parties in government promoted the policy 'power in exchange for (post) security' to the civil service. Political patronage for the higher civil service posts was widespread and the responsibilities of civil servants in policy-making remained limited. In the nineties, Cassese's reform attempted to give more powers and responsibilities to the

higher civil service, but part of the reform was never implemented for the reasons we have described above. Furthermore, Bassanini's reforms at the end of the twentieth century introduced a new spoils system into the Italian civil service. Political instability, which has remained high even in the last twenty years, and the new spoils system rules produced a continuous process of 'in and out' with regard to the higher civil service posts. The policy that ruled the relationship between higher civil service and politics changed from security (of tenured) guaranteed by political parties in return for less power for civil servants to more administrative powers and money (for higher civil servants) in return of a new political patronage for political parties. The consequence has been a transient and acephalous civil service and the role of politics, through the ministerial cabinets made by temporary civil servants appointed from outside by the Minister, has remained predominant in policy advice, policy design and policy-making. Indeed, policy-making is not carried out by officials. Preparation of legislation is done in the ministerial cabinets. Officials only perform executive routine work, yet even that can be sabotaged. Many laws and acts are not implemented and executed by the administration. The Italian civil service has remained weak in front of politics and spurious for the spoils system mechanism. Its instability and precariousness have put the higher civil service at the mercy of politics (Cassese 2014). Professional civil servants has continued to be mere formal enforcers of laws, means and aims established by politics.

To conclude we showed that administrative traditions matter when administrative reforms are inspired to a global policy paradigm, as in the case of the New Public Management. This paradigm constitutes a wide range of different instruments, and thus it is no surprise that each individual country has chosen to combine these instruments using clearly diverse methods and approaches (Olsen and Peters 1994; Hood 1996). It is thus only to be expected that each country has established the managerial paradigm according to its own specific structural and cultural characteristics. In particular, we believe that the introduction of instruments for efficient management is closely linked to the nature of the administrative tradition. As a consequence, during the implementation phase of the reforms, policy guidelines on NPM instruments and strategies has been all interpreted in ways that did not meet the expectations. This fact is due to the re-shaping performed by administrative traditions. The historical characteristics of the Italian politico-administrative systems enables those charged with the duty of implementing legislative innovations to normalize the real impact thereof. This reworking permits the re-contextualization of new policy concepts and instruments within the administrative traditions. The result was that the NPM paradigm being trapped within the Italian historical persistences.

What we are dealing with here is a typical feature of the history of Italy's public administration that constitutes its expression, action and interaction. Nothing has in fact been radically changed: new public management have simply been re-elaborated and updated as a result of outside pressure and of the transformation of the socio-economic system. As Tolbert and Zucker (1983) pointed out the adoption of a policy or program by an organization is importantly determined by the extent to whi-

ch the measure is institutionalized — whether by law or by gradual legitimation. In the Italian case the law was present, indeed redundant, but legitimation lacked for cultural and historical reasons. Despite socio-political changes, the hegemonic administrative traditions survived by adapting and without changing its deep core structure. What emerges from the Italian case is that the factors within the administrative sector and features of the administrative culture has made all the difference to relate to the NPM paradigm.

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