

Variations in the Quality of Government within the European Union: a Comparative Approach of Northern and Southern Public Bureaucracies

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The quality of government represents a critical parameter of modern states for delivering sound public policies for the benefit of citizens. Dimensions such as accountability, impartiality, mechanisms which cope effectively with corruption and government effectiveness stand as core components of the quality of government, whereas at the same time account for much of the variation in the quality of government across European Union (EU) countries. This paper seeks to examine the quality of government by comparing and contrasting countries of the EU with substantially different administrative characteristics and traditions. The research explores two Nordic countries, namely Denmark and Sweden, and, two Mediterranean countries, Italy and Greece.

Taking stock of theoretical insights from the political and economic literature the core aim of the paper is to identify plausible explanations with regard to the variations in the quality of government across the four selected EU member-states. The research draws on quantitative data based on the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and the European Quality of Government index (EQGI). It is argued that certain traits (legacies) of the political-administrative systems of the countries under examination can explain much of the observed, often striking, variations in the quality of government between the North and the South European bureaucracies

KEYWORDS: administrative models; government; quality; institutions; public administration.

The quality of government has been a critical parameter in modern states' functioning. The capacity of states to deliver sound public policies: a) effectively with reasonable and affordable costs, b) with democratic accountability and transparency, c) impartially and with low (ideally: absence of) corruption and, d) under the rule of law, has been a major challenge nowadays. The provision of fair treatment to all citizens with a view to safeguard public interest in tandem with the promotion of social and economic welfare has brought into the forefront the issue of the quality of government as the tool for states to effectively respond to contemporary social and economic challenges. In this respect, a new strand of academic literature has been developing with the primer aim to deal with the issue of the quality of government, providing new insights about the extend modern states deliver sound public policies to citizens.

From another point of view, the issue of the quality of government is linearly connected with the politico-administrative apparatus of the state. Public bureaucracies are considered to be in-

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Abstract

Introduction



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stitutions in charge of participating in certain stages of the public policy cycle serving as the main nexus between political actors' decisions and citizens' needs. In contemporary democracies governments publicly announce the broad context and the general principles of their political programmes and public administrations are bound to effectively implement them, serving as the administrative mechanism of the state. In this vein, the way public policies are executed is principally contingent on the capacity of public institutions to effectively deliver them; the latter is highly depended on the quality of government: the higher the quality the better the delivery of public policies.

Focusing in Europe, it is interesting to examine whether public administrations of the member states of the European Union (EU) share a common administrative pattern and if different patterns lead to a variety in the quality of governance. In the first place there is no such thing as a common "European administrative space - EAS" or even a single administrative pattern that member states are required to converge (Knill, 2001; for a discussion of the EAS see: Trondal and Peters, 2013; Heidbreder, 2011). Secondly, national administrations within the EU have historically followed different administrative paths, though they build their bureaucracies on the premises of the Weberian bureaucratic model (Weber, 1946) especially in the continental Europe. The degree to which the Weberian administrative pattern has been fully embedded across the EU countries varies due to adjustments that have been introduced, i.e. by adopting market tools and elaborating techniques found basically on economic literature (New Institutional Economics; North, 1986, 1991) and managerial approaches (Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1990) or by ill-appropriate implementation of some of its basic principles, i.e. professionalism. Thus, different administrative patterns (as well as traditions) can be traced in the European continent: some EU countries follow the continental administrative paradigm, others the Southern model, whereas in North Europe is evident the Nordic pattern as a distinct administrative tradition (for a discussion of the models see: Painter and Peters 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011).

This paper addresses the issue of quality of government by drawing on certain EU member states that share different administrative characteristics and traditions. The overall objective is to examine the relationship between administrative models and traditions and the quality of government. In particular, the primary focus is on countries with different administrative patterns located in Northern and Southern Europe, which show remarkably opposite results in terms of their quality of government (most dissimilar case-studies). Denmark and Sweden stand for two Northern countries that follow the Nordic administrative model. On the other hand, Italy and Greece represent two Mediterranean countries that share core traits of the so-called Mediterranean or Southern administrative model. As it will be revealed by the analysis, the two administrative patterns bear little resemblance between each other.

The core aim of the paper is to identify the basic features of the two different organizational patterns and link them with the discussion on the performance of quality of government within the four countries. Two hypotheses are critically explored: the first one (H1) suggests that in terms of the quality of government, the Nordic administrative model performs better when compared with the corresponding Southern pattern due to its unique features which allow for better focus on effectiveness and efficiency; the second hypothesis (H2) argues that, when considering the Southern experience, the low performance in the quality of government is mostly related with mismanagement and ill-adjustments of the very basic principles of the Weberian pattern, rather than on inherent deficiencies of the model per se. The research question deals with pointing out the principal factors that are related with the striking variations in the quality of government between EU Northern and Southern public administrations. From a theoretical point of view, it is argued that the administrative model according to which public bureaucracies have been organ-

ized stands for a critical factor in the successful delivery of public policies and is directly related (and positively correlated) with the performance measured by the quality of government index.

The literature on the quality of government tends to employ various approaches in order to interpret the related performance. La Porta et al. (1998) argue about three broad theoretical strands that have been used so as to explain the quality of government, namely economic, political and cultural theories. In this analysis, the explanatory variable is considered to be the administrative model which, in turn, accounts for variations in the quality of government. In this respect, the paper aims to contribute in the literature by offering a different yet fruitful context of analysis.

Methodologically, the paper utilizes the performance of the politico-administrative apparatus of two dissimilar groups of countries according to their rankings in the European Quality of Government Index (EQGI) and the respective World Bank Index (WBI): on the one hand, Italy and Greece, and on the other Denmark and Sweden. Building on the premises of administrative organization models, it analyzes the relationship between quality of government (dependent variable) and established administrative patterns (independent variable). Intervening variables such as administrative legacies are employed and critically examined regarding the observed variations in the quality of government between Northern and Southern European public institutions. The performance of Northern and Southern administrative paradigms is examined in terms of their scores in quality of government, validating the aforementioned hypotheses.

In what follows, the paper makes some necessary clarifications with regard to: a) the concept of quality of government, and b) the administrative models that characterize Northern and Southern European public bureaucracies. Then are presented the results of the EQGI and WGI for the countries under examination. The forth part of the paper discusses the performance of public bureaucracies and links the results with reference to the respective administrative patterns. The last part summarizes the conclusions.

Quality of government –in particular techniques regarding its measurement– is a relatively new research field in the academic literature and gradually attracts more and more attention. In general, is related with the social and economic development of a country, and the overall well-being (Helliwell and Huang, 2008) of a society. It has been held that, at its birth, the notion was conceived as “good governance” or “state capacity” and was referred mostly to developing countries and countries in transition (Rothstein and Teorell, 2012). La Porta et al. (1998) suggest that there are exogenous variables related with the quality of government and linked with economic, political and cultural circumstances. However, they employ the –rather– narrow view of the concept of “good government” as they use it with the meaning of “good-for-capitalist-development” (La Porta et al., 1998, p. 3). This point of view and other similar ones have been criticized since they were deemed to be extremely broad, functionally insufficient, and subjective mostly to corruption, setting aside other important dimensions (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008, 2012). Recent literature conceptualizes the term providing a more holistic point of view by encapsulating dimensions of government other-than-corruption. Rothstein and Teorell (2008) have argued about the (influential) dimension of impartiality as a critical component of the quality of government, since it stands for the common denominator of lack of corruption, respect to the rule of law and government effectiveness. They define the quality of government as “the impartiality of institutions that exercise government authority” (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008, p. 165).

This article focuses on the functional side of the quality of government rather than on normative aspects of the concept (for an in-depth analysis see: Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). The functional side of government performance is measured nowadays with elaborate indices. The first index regarding “good governance” has been introduced by the World Bank in 1990s. This paper em-

Theoretical considerations: quality of government and administrative traditions

employs the European Quality of Government Index (EQGI) which has been developed by the Institute of Government at the University of Göteborg, with published data from 2010 (Charron and Lapuente, 2011). In conjunction with the EQGI, findings of the World Bank Governance Index (WBI/ or WGI) are also used for discussing the results in government performance. In general, the main components of the EQGI are impartiality, control (ideally absence) of corruption, rule of law, effectiveness, fair treatment to all citizens. Charron and Lapuente (2018, p. 6) approach quality of government “as a broad, latent multi-dimensional concept consisting of high impartiality and quality of public service delivery, along with low corruption”. More specifically, the determinants of the EQGI employed by the analysis (2017 EQGI; Charron and Lapuente, 2018, p. 14) are quality, impartiality, and corruption which are measured in certain policy areas such as in education, health, and rule of law.

Interestingly, the EQGI has two unique features: firstly, it is based on survey data on citizen attitudes, perceptions and experiences of prominent public policy fields in the EU rather than on established indicators for economic and social performance (i.e. per capita GDP). Secondly, it is the only index referred to the quality of government drawing on data gathered from the subnational level of government, contrary to all other existing indices (as well as the WGI) which focus on the national level. In this way, data are provided (aggregated results) both for EU member states as well as for regional administrative units (EU NUTS level 1 and 2) within EU countries. In turn, not only differences found across EU countries but also regional disparities within an EU country can provide in-depth information for further analysis with regard to the performance of (sub)national governmental institutions. In fact, it has been suggested that data gathered at the subnational level may trump those referred to the national level (Charron et al., 2014, p. 70).

Quality of government constitutes a critical variable in assessing the performance of public institutions. In this article it serves as a dependent variable contingent on the administrative pattern EU member states have based their bureaucratic structures. In trying to analyze the variance of governmental institutions performance, most scholars have put forward economic, political and social reasoning and deployed respective variables so as to explain why some countries (i.e. La Porta et al., 1998) and sub-state entities as well (Charron and Lapuente, 2011; Charron et al., 2014) perform better than others. La Porta et al. (1998) in their analysis deploy among other determinants of the quality of government a strategy which uses countries’ legal system and the tradition that is created so as to explain the performance of institutions. This approach seems to be relevant with the administrative dimension, yet it does not address organizational aspects. The same pertains to the analysis made by Charron and Lapuente (2011) who argue about the existence of phenomena of patronage and clientelistic networks in institutions within the same country (Italy) which, in turn, boost corruption; however, since these traits do not constitute typical characteristics of the Southern administrative model but signify distortions of it, the discussion about administrative models still remains neglected. Although their analysis is based on path dependent characteristics which are found on Southern public bureaucracies (Italy), administrative patterns have not been taken into consideration.

Comparing and contrasting administrative models

The Nordic model represents a distinct administrative pattern found in Northern European countries, particularly in Sweden and Denmark, as well as in Norway and Finland. The two countries are unitary states, but they are characterized by significant degree of political and fiscal decentralization horizontally (within central government institutions) and vertically (from a multi-level governance perspective). Major competencies have been transferred from ministries to autonomous/functionally decentralized agencies (for a discussion on agencification see: Pollitt et al., 2005; also: Lampropoulou, 2019) as well as to subnational –principally local– government, which

enjoy high degree of independence from the ministerial bodies; this feature constitutes a particular historical legacy. In general, the basic characteristics of the Nordic administrative tradition include social participation, consensual style of politics, decentralized architecture, and highly autonomous and/or independent (“at arms’ length”) operating agencies across various policy fields (Painter and Peters, 2010, p. 22). The existence of functionally autonomous and/or independent from the central government authorities’ agencies has been suggested that could lead to increased fragmentation and less coordination between central government offices and agencies (Jacobsson et al., 2004, p. 15-16). In addition, democratic accountability issues may arise. On the other hand, it may also imply less chances for political interventions not only in agencies’ ordinary policy-making but also in their operational dimensions as well (i.e. in human resource management issues). In total, ‘agencification’ represents a core feature of the model and is related with promoting efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism of the public bureaucracy so as better cope with public policy problems, and in particular with citizens’ needs.

Furthermore, there are two representative types of the Nordic administrative model, the east (dualist) and the west (monistic) type (Jacobsson et al., 2004; Veggeland, 2007). At the heart of the east Nordic model, which dates back in the administrative regulations of “Axel Oxenstierna” regarding the ‘status of the colleges’ in 1634 (Veggeland, 2007, p. 32), there is a clear distinction between governmental offices and central agencies in the sense that the latter enjoy full operational autonomy, are formally independent from the ministries (though tied by contractual agreements regarding i.e. their performance) and are held accountable to the ministerial cabinet as a whole (Veggeland, 2007) instead of being accountable only to the minister who holds responsibility for a (specific) policy field (Jacobsson et al., 2004, p. 16). Thus, ministerial rule is prohibited. With regard to the west Nordic type which is traced back in 1660 (i.e. during the Danish absolute monarchy of Frederick III), the autonomy of the agencies is confined in comparison to their Swedish counterparts and there is significant ministerial administration (‘ministerial model’; Veggeland, 2007, p. 32). Ministers have responsibility for agencies and are held accountable by the parliament for their actions (Jacobsson et al., 2004, p. 16). Reform inertia tends to characterize this type when compared to the east Nordic pattern, however, it has been also argued that, on the whole, the Nordic model is quite agile and adaptive in reforms (Greeve et al., 2019). Sweden falls within the east Nordic administrative tradition and Finland as well (Veggeland, 2007). On the contrary, Denmark and Norway are characterized by the tradition of the west Nordic type (Jacobsson et al., 2004).

With regard to the architecture of governance as a whole, in Denmark the central administration is based on 18 ministries¹. In addition, there are autonomous agencies responsible for various policy fields². At the subnational level there are 98 municipalities and 5 regional authorities which have been established in 2007. Subnational government expenditure accounts for 34.9% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) and the biggest proportion of the Danish public expenditure are spent by subnational institutions (approximately 63.7%; mostly municipalities), implying a high degree of fiscal decentralization (OECD, 2017). As regards to Sweden, its central administration is comprised of 22 ministries³ and many autonomous agencies⁴ with delegated authority over issues in various policy domains. The Swedish central public administration has been organized on a very decentralized style of governance, since many operational responsi-

1 <https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/en/members/the-government> (assessed in 20 July 2019).

2 For instance, the task for the developing ideas about quality and sound fiscal management has been attributed to the Agency of Modernization (<https://modst.dk> assessed in 20 July 2019).

3 <https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/> (assessed in 21 July 2019).

4 Tasks relating to organization, governance and development of the public sector fall within the responsibilities of the Swedish Agency for Public Management (<http://www.statskontoret.se> assessed in 21 July 2019). According to a report (Swedish Agency for Public Management) in January 2016 there were 347 agencies.

bilities have been attributed to decentralized autonomous agencies (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, p. 42). In addition, the administrative reforms during the 1980s and 1990s have further decentralized the state, delegating more authorities to local institutions (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, p. 51). According to the Committee of the Regions (2014) Sweden's government structure is highly decentralized, including 21 counties and 290 municipalities with predefined competencies and without any hierarchical relation between the two levels of subnational government.

Contrary to core features of the Nordic administrative model is placed the Southern administrative pattern which is found in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece (Painter and Peters, 2010; Ongaro, 2010). The Southern European administrative tradition is principally based on the Continental tradition, which in turn, follows the Napoleonic administrative legacy (Peters, 2008). The core features of the Napoleonic administrative tradition, found on the Southern pattern as well, are related with strong legalism (administration bound to the law), administrative actions that are primarily based in constitutional law, limited administrative discretion which is checked by administrative/judicial supervision, formality, focus on administrative procedures (rather than on results), impartiality, uniformity, professionalism and centralized architecture of governance (Peters and Painter, 2010). In addition, what uniquely characterizes the Southern administrative tradition, standing as a deviation/departure from the Weberian type, is the high degree of politicization and the existence of political interventions, particularly with regard to appointments –not only at the higher echelons of hierarchy but also at the bottom (Sotiropoulos, 2004).

In general, the Southern pattern is principally based on ministerial rule which is in contrast to the basic rationale of the Nordic (east) model. However, exogenous variables such as fiscal pressures (budget constraints) and endogenous deficiencies (i.e. corruption and clientelistic practices) have created impetus for increasing transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of the model. In particular, New Institutional Economics (North, 1986, 1991) and managerial techniques based on the New Public Management (NPM) trend (Pollitt, 1990) have induced gradual change which has led to the adoption of new administrative tools. Thus, efforts for the reorganization the politico-administrative apparatus of the Southern countries have included not only fiscal tools for increasing economy and efficiency but also the establishment of independent agencies in various policy fields, a trait which has been at the core of the Nordic administrative model for a very long period of time. In this respect, the ministerial rule has given ground to professionalism and expertise, thus putting new emphasis on the dichotomy between politics and administration (Wilson, 1887) even in policy areas which are considered to be part of the very heart of the state (i.e. in the field of collecting tax revenues⁵). The rationale behind this is directly linked with depoliticizing public bureaucracy, partly in line with the argument for minimizing political pressures on administration.

With regard to the architecture of governance, Italy is a unitary state, however, in practice is considered to be quite decentralized. There are 13 ministries⁶ and autonomous agencies as well held responsible for specific policy areas. The subnational administrative level of Italy is comprised of 20 regions (five of which have special statute and enjoy special autonomy granted by the Constitution), 110 provinces (two of which have special statute and autonomy) and 8,092 municipalities (Committee of the Regions, 2014). Interestingly, the Italian architecture of governance has allowed for a significant degree of fiscal decentralization, which resembles to a certain extent to the Nordic model. Subnational government expenditure in Italy accounts for 14.5% of the national GDP while a considerable proportion of public expenditure is spent by subnational institutions (approximately 28.8%), supporting fiscal decentralization argumentation (OECD, 2017). Finally, Greece is characterized as a unitary and one of

5 Drawing from the Greek case (Lampropoulou and Oikonomou, 2018).

6 <http://www.governo.it/it/i-ministeri-0> (assessed in: 20 July 2019)

7 Considering the last reform effort in 2018 (Law 4555; "Kleisthenis" programme).

the most centralized states in Europe, although since 2010 initiatives have been launched for political and administrative decentralization (Hlepas, 2018; Oikonomou, 2019). Regarding the architecture of governance, there are 19 ministries in central government, and several independent agencies. In the subnational level there are 332 municipalities⁷ and 13 regions (self-governed authorities) as well as seven decentralized administrations serving as state bodies. In sharp contrast to the Nordic countries as well as Italy, the degree of fiscal decentralization in Greece is considered to be significant low since subnational government expenditure is approximately only 3.4% of the national GDP. In addition, a small proportion of public expenditure is spent by subnational (self-governed) authorities (approximately 6.2%), evident of the very low degree of fiscal decentralization of the country (OECD, 2017).

According to Veggeland (2007, p. 33) Nordic and the Continental (or Napoleonic in a more broader sense) models present some similarities in terms of the size of the public sector, job security policies and trade union relations⁸. However, the two models do not share many common features. The principal difference is found on their core objectives. On the one hand, the Nordic tradition aims at serving citizens with efficiency, effectiveness, with quality and innovative tools and services. In this regard, the dichotomy between political and administrative sphere is clearer in comparison to the Southern administrative model. In addition, professionalism and expertise, performance-based techniques and results-oriented public management constitute basic features of the model. On the other hand, the Southern administrative model aims primarily at legality, is strictly hierarchical, rather unsusceptible to innovation in a considerable extend, highly centralized, with limited administrative discretion, process-oriented, and with human resource management incentives such as a better position in (hierarchical) ranking and higher remuneration, yet with limited interest in optimum resource allocation, efficiency and economy at least in the first place.

Table 1 summarizes the discussion about core features of the two administrative models. Overall, Nordic administrative model is decentralized based on the extensive use of independent agencies, result-oriented and places emphasis on accountability and transparency through criteria such as openness, efficiency and effectiveness (output legitimacy⁹). On the other hand, Southern model is centralized, procedure-based, hierarchical and with low degree of openness to citizens; it aims at impartiality and is primarily focused on following the ministerial rule so as to be held accountable (input legitimacy) rather than enjoying high degree of autonomy and administrative discretion.

Basic characteristics	Nordic model	Southern model
Legal basis for state	Yes	Yes
State and society	Organicist / Welfarist	Interventionist
Architecture of government	'Open Government' approach; Decentralized through administrative and/or political decentralization	Hierarchical and centralized (Italy: vertically decentralized – regions with high institutional autonomy)
Civil service	High status; professional, non-politicized; segmented and (horizontally – independent agencies) decentralized (mostly in Sweden)	Low status, politicized
Primary objective(s)	Emphasis on results, accountability based on effectiveness and efficiency	Rule of law, (shadow of) hierarchy, following procedures, impartiality

Source: Painter and Peters (2010, p. 20) and own elaboration.

Table 1

Basic traits of Nordic and the Southern administrative models.

⁸ In this regard, it has been argued that the Nordic model is a blend of the Continental and the Anglo-Saxon administrative models and their traditions (Veggeland, 2007, p. 33).

⁹ On an annual basis, agencies submit a report to the Government with information about, inter alia, results, expenses, and revenue (<https://www.government.se/how-sweden-is-governed/public-agencies-and-how-they-are-governed/> assessed in 5.7.2019).

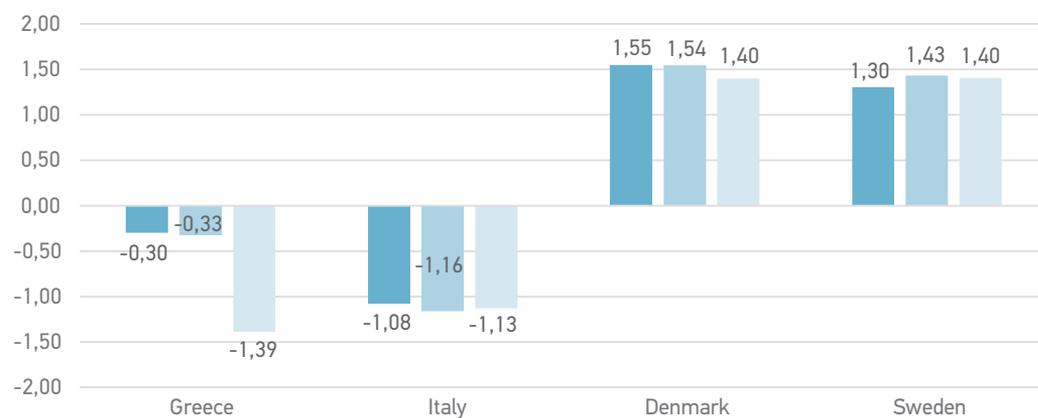
Northern vs. Southern bureaucracies: quality of government in comparative perspective

The Nordic and Southern administrative models constitute two distinct traditions with regard to the organization of public institutions. Despite the fact that both models aim at facilitating the organization of bureaucratic structures so as to facilitate the implementation of public policies to the benefit of societies, remarkable variability is found with regard to the quality of government. According to quantitative data based on the European Quality of Government index (EQGI) as well as the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) Sweden and Denmark perform excellent and are among the leaders in quality of government, whereas Italy and Greece significantly lag behind scoring very low in the same index. However, it should be noted that significant differences are found with Italy.

Figure 1 depicts the overall picture of the quality of government index for Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Greece in three different reference years. In general, there is a pattern of continuity for all countries regarding their scores (with the exception of Greece in 2017). According to the data, Italy and Greece rank very low and have always scored negatively. On the contrary, Sweden and Denmark have always scored high values of quality of government and have been ranked among the countries with the highest performance. In the first place, Italy scores negative values in all three years and its best result was in 2010 (-1.08). Greece has deteriorated its scores within the years; it was rated with -0.3 in 2010 but in 2017 the quality of government index significantly decreased reaching one of the lowest among EU countries (-1.39). The situation is totally different in Nordic states. Denmark scores the highest value in 2010 (1.55) implying great quality of government and the same pertains to Sweden; the latter ranks in the same position with Denmark in 2017 as both countries share the same score (1.4).

Figure 1

Evolution of the EQoG index.



Source: Charron and Lapuente (2018); own elaboration.

Figure 2 shows a more detailed analysis of the performance of the four countries with regard to the three EQGI components, namely quality, impartiality and corruption, for the year 2017. Evidently, Italy shows to cope with greater problems in issues of impartiality (-1.31) and corruption (-1.19), since in the dimension of quality the country scores better (-0.76). Greece lags behind in all three dimensions compared with all the other countries, and mostly in quality (-1.4) whereas in the other two components of the EQGI the country do not significantly vary from Italy. In sharp contrast to these results, Sweden and Denmark perform excellent in

corruption (1.56 and 1.54 respectively) as well as in quality and impartiality where they present identical scores (1.23 & 1.22 respectively in quality; 1.28 in impartiality).

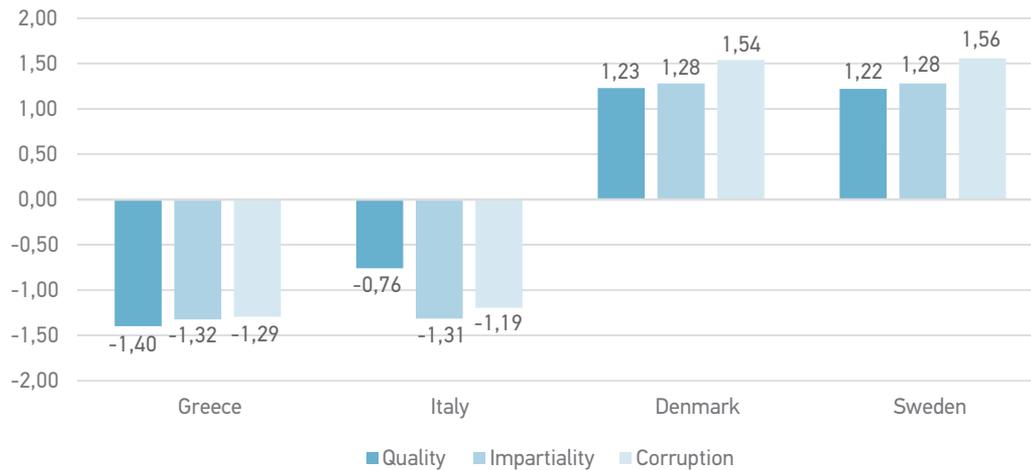


Figure 2

EQG index (2017).

Source: Charron and Lapuente (2018); own elaboration.

Table 2 presents an alternative view of the quality of government. Data are based on the WGI and the categories that are measured are four: voice and accountability, government effectiveness, rule of law and control of corruption, whereas the combined quality of government (QoG) index stands for average values. The overall picture regarding the performance of the four countries in analysis do not alter. Sweden and Denmark score the highest indices in all four categories. On the contrary, Italy and Greece lag significantly behind and with the exception of the category of ‘rule of law’ the two countries show identical average performance.

Country/ component	Voice & accountability	Government effectiveness	Rule of law	Control of Corruption	Combined QoG
Denmark	1.61	2.17	1.92	2.42	2.03
Sweden	1.59	1.96	1.95	2.22	1.93
Italy	0.94	0.45	0.41	-0.01	0.45
Greece	0.82	0.48	0.57	-0.15	0.43

Table 2

Dimensions of quality in government (2012-WGI).

Source: Charron et al. (2018, p. 17). Data based on WGI.

In total, the analysis of the components of the EQGI and the WGI as well regarding the four countries under examination attests their overall (average) performance. Nordic countries show significantly higher quality of government when compared to their counterparts in South Europe. As already has been held, the two groups of countries have followed quite different administrative paths. However, can indeed different administrative legacies produce variability in quality of government? Is there any ideal type of administrative model according to which –if public bureaucracies adopt it– better organizational results can be achieved? Effort is made for providing answers to these questions in the next section.

Discussion: quality of government and administrative patterns

Prima facie, the EU lacks a coherent administrative pattern inasmuch as it has only coordinating powers in the administrative field. In fact, the Treaties do not prescribe any specific administrative model, thus, public policy with regard to the organization of the administrative apparatus is considered to be in principal member states' competency. However, the EU recognizes the importance of (sub)national administrations in the implementation of 'acquis communautaire' and through policy diffusion and learning promotes the sharing of common policy tools and techniques among member states (European Commission, 2017) thus, facilitating European integration process, in spite of the fact that these tools are considered as 'soft' Europeanization mechanisms.

When focusing on the administrative field on the European arena and employing the analytical lenses of states administrative models, evidently, there are different administrative traditions that countries, and –most often– groups of countries have embedded in their politico-administrative apparatus. In this respect, the Nordic and the Southern models are viewed as two different administrative types pertaining to particular organizational features as already has been described. Since the implementation of public policies is contingent on public bureaucracies, the quality of the latter highly affects the former. In other words, the quality of government is, apparently, linearly connected with organizational outcomes and outputs, and the overall performance of public institutions per se; in that sense, institutions do matter. Respectively, the higher the quality of government, the better the delivery of public policies and the greater the results in terms of serving the public interest and promoting social and economic welfare.

From another point of view, it could be held that the quality of government is linked with the administrative pattern of a country. When comparing and contrasting the Nordic and the Southern models, it is evident that there is a huge quality of government 'cleavage' within the EU, interestingly even within the same country if focusing on the case of Italy¹⁰. Indeed, Nordic countries perform much better than their Southern counterparts. This is mostly explained by the results-oriented predisposition of the Nordic model, as well as the professionalism which characterizes this organizational pattern. In addition, political patronage regarding i.e. clientelistic recruitment of personnel is not evident in the two Nordic countries, a feature that could impact negatively in terms of organizational performance. Agencies in Sweden and Denmark are placed "at arm's length" from the political system, focused on delivering results and held accountable on the basis of their performance rather than on following rigid procedures without administrative discretion, a feature that characterizes the Southern model, which also faces problems and distortions of its normative features, such as political patronage. The same pertains with regard to local government, since local institutions have the competencies and the fiscal capacity to implement public policies. Thus, both specialized agencies and subnational institutions as well, are based on the professional skills of their personnel and achieve high scores regarding their rankings in quality, corruption, rule of law, and impartiality in the respective indices (EQGI and WGI).

The story goes the other way around when considering the Southern administrative pattern. Though the model has been built on the premises of the Weberian bureaucratic model (Weber, 1946) which, ideally, presupposes inter alia professionalism, rule of law, hierarchy and

10 For instance, a closer look of the EQGI results for 2017 reveal that the Northern part of the country (i.e. Trento, Bolzano, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia) score better than Southern regions (i.e. Calabria, Abruzzo, Basilicata, Sicilia, Campania, Puglia) and seem to share more with neighboring regions of other countries (i.e. Austria) rather than with regions of the Italian South (for detailed results see: Charron and Lapuente, 2018).

impartiality, Southern bureaucracies have been eroded in practice by political patronage and clientelistic practices. As a result, core traits of the Weberian pattern as found in the Italian and Greek public administrations have been blurred, particularly those of professionalism and meritocracy in human resources management. It should be emphasized the fact that in Italy, during the period 1973–1990, about 350,000 civil servants had been recruited without entrance examination, whereas approximately 250,000 civil servants had been hired through regular exams (Ongaro, 2010, p. 64). It has been suggested that this phenomenon was mostly evident in Southern Italy and that “since 1995, the percentage of civil servants from southern regions in central administration was 73 per cent of the total amount” (Ongaro, 2010, p. 64). The territorial dimension of this phenomenon is depicted when considering the EQGI scores of the Italian regions where there is significant variation in quality of government within the same country which is explained by the existence of “patrimonial clientelistic networks” (Charron and Lapuente, 2011). This evident led to the claim that, with regard to the quality of institutions, seemingly it matters most the region someone lives rather than the country (Charron et al., 2018, p. 9).

By the same token, similar findings can be traced in Greece. It has been argued that in 1992 more than half of the public servants had been recruited without entrance examinations but mostly through clientelistic practices (Ministry of the Presidency, 1992). Such practices included recruitments with short-time contracts mostly based on clientelistic practices, which sooner or later (particularly before general elections) were converted by law into permanent public service positions. Likewise, it has been estimated that in 2010, in a total sum of 570,000 public servants (government census¹¹) approximately 170,000 had been appointed through meritocratic criteria under regular examination processes supervised by the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection. In addition, a small proportion of public servants had been recruited through professional training schools (i.e. the Greek National School of Public Administration) whereas a significant number¹² had not been selected and appointed through regular examinations (Oikonomou, 2019).

In a nutshell, taking into account the aforementioned argumentation in conjunction with the data on EQGI and WGI, it could be argued that there is evidence that the Nordic model perform much better vis-à-vis the Southern administrative pattern and this is mostly due to its primary focus on components such as efficiency and effectiveness, professionalism and considerable institutional autonomy resulting in minimizing political interventions, thus confirming the first hypothesis. With regard to the second hypothesis, the fact that Southern model scores low in the quality of government index should not be considered as evident of the inferiority of the Weberian bureaucratic model per se. In fact, political patronage and clientelistic practices in South (Sotiropoulos, 2004; regarding the Greek case see also: Spanou, 2008) have served as mediating factors which represent a particular feature of historical legacy, and have given rise to mismanagement and ill-adjustments of core organizational features of the Weberian pattern, smoothing the way for the departure from the very principles of the model, such as professionalism and impartiality. These factors account for much of the variation in the quality of government between Nordic and Southern administrative traditions rather than on inherent deficiencies of the Weberian model, thus attesting the second hypothesis as well.

11 With permanent positions and long-term contracts (quasi-permanent).

12 Estimated to double-digit.

Conclusion

The article aimed to contribute in the discussion on the quality of government in EU member states by proposing a context of analysis which is related with countries' administrative pattern; the latter it was argued that has a significant impact on the quality of government as measured by the EQGI and WGI. Two different administrative paradigms were taken into account, namely the Nordic and the Southern model. The observed –striking– variations in the quality of government of the Northern and Southern bureaucracies are principally related with different embedded characteristics and orientations of the two distinctive types.

On the one hand, the performance of the Nordic model found in Denmark and Sweden is ranked among the best of its kind. The existence of independent agencies in both countries operating at arms' length from political supervision and bound by contractual agreements, based on professionalism and result-oriented focus, primarily aiming at efficiency and effectiveness, constitute traits that contribute to the excellent performance as clearly depicted by the score of the two Nordic EU member states. On the other hand, the Southern administrative model is based on the Weberian type which is characterized by rule of law, is procedure-oriented, chiefly hierarchical, and is focusing on impartiality and professionalism. However, Italy and Greece have deviated from the ideal (Weberian) pattern since the latter has been eroded by political patronage and clientelistic practices and less responsiveness and adaptation to innovation. In turn, both countries significantly lag behind in terms of their performance in the quality of government.

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