

Article

# From Neo-Weberian to Hybrid Governance Models in Public Administration: Differences between State and Local Self-Government

Aleksander Aristovnik , Eva Murko and Dejan Ravšelj 

Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; eva.murko@fu.uni-lj.si (E.M.); dejan.ravselj@fu.uni-lj.si (D.R.)

\* Correspondence: aleksander.aristovnik@fu.uni-lj.si

**Abstract:** Public administration and public governance play a crucial role in society today by ensuring that social needs are met. Due to the constantly changing environment, public governance models have transformed many times, creating differences in public governance practices among public administration institutions, with combinations of contradictory structures and principles that coexist. Accordingly, this paper aims to provide an overview of different public governance models, extract quantifiable elements based on models' principles and examine the extent of layering of different governance models at different levels of public administration in the specific case of the Slovenian administration. Thus, the main focus is on identifying the differences in characteristics of public governance practices between state administration and local self-government. The results show state administration institutions are more strongly characterised by the Neo-Weberian model's principles. In contrast, local self-government institutions are more oriented to managerial public governance and Digital-Era Governance practices. Public managers may regard the results as additional resources for democratic and efficient governing. At the same time, they may provide policymakers with in-depth insights to consider while determining the trajectories of future public administration reforms.

**Keywords:** public governance models; Weberian public administration; New Public Management; Good Governance; hybrid models; state administration; local self-government; Comparative Analysis; Slovenia



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## 1. Introduction

Public administration and public governance need to keep pace with the constantly dynamic socio-economic environment and look for ways to improve their productivity and process efficiency while also increasing collaboration (Hammerschmid et al. 2019; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Sørensen and Torfing 2021), since they play a crucial role in today's society by taking care of social needs. Social, economic, and political changes bringing significant challenges have led to public administration and public governance models being profoundly transformed many times to adapt to the changing environment. This indicates that current public administration institutions encounter conflicting ideas, structures, demands, and cultural elements (Iacovino et al. 2017). As administrative reforms are multi-dimensional with "mixed" orders, they create differences in public governance practices among public administration institutions, with combinations of contradictory structures and principles that coexist (Olsen 2007), as specific trends of earlier models remain when new model ideas arrive (Dunleavy et al. 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).

We can observe three main pillars in the development of public governance models, starting with: (i) the traditional public administration (the Weberian public administration); (ii) the managerial model (New Public Management (NPM)); and (iii) Governance and Hybrid models (Neo-Weberian State (NWS), Good Governance (GG), New Public Governance, Digital-Era Governance (DEG), and Alternative/Hybrid models).

The Slovenian public administration is characterised by numerous elements, also linked to the fact that Slovenia has been a small yet independent and autonomous state since 1991 and a full European Union member since 2004 (Kovač and Jukić 2016). Slovenia started to develop a democratic environment immediately based on market mechanisms from the New Public Management model after it gained independence in 1991. The modernisation of its public administration was associated with overall endeavours to ensure the quality of governance and redefine the role of state structures (Virant 2009; Pečarič 2011). Nevertheless, the public administration reforms, underpinned by an efficient Weberian concept, have gradually emerged over two to three decades. The most radical reform came in 1994, strictly separating the functions of the municipalities (local self-government) from those of the state administration. The Slovenian public administration reforms were introduced over several steps, including creating the new state, modernisation of the public administration, consolidation, and Europeanisation. Changes resulted from different approaches, ranging from legislative amendments to parliamentary strategies and individual organisations' actions (Kovač and Virant 2011; Kovač and Jukić 2016).

The latest strategy (Slovenian Public Administration Strategy 2015–2020) adopted in 2015 mainly introduces the New Public Management practices, besides the classical Rechtsstaat principle. One outcome has been the Total Quality Management approach found across the Slovenian public administration and, in some parts, a considerable emphasis on user orientation. However, we can observe that the characteristics of the Neo-Weberian State prevail, especially in state public administration institutions, regardless of any strategic approaches leaning towards the New Public Management and Good Governance practices (Kovač and Jukić 2016).

On this foundation, this paper aims to theoretically examine the overview of different public governance models in Western European and Anglo-Saxon countries from the traditional model of public administration onward (the 1950s), including their associated characteristics and principles, based on scientific literature identified as highly relevant in the Scopus database, and extract quantifiable elements based on the models' principles. Elements are applied to an empirical case based on a sample of 81 managers of public administration institutions in Slovenia. The data for the empirical analysis are gathered through a survey entailing personal interviews that asked public managers to indicate their views on the current state and future opportunities of public governance in their institution. Each question in the survey reflected principles belonging to one governance model. The empirical analysis examines the extent of layering of different governance models and at varying levels of public administration (state administration vs. local-self-government), leading to the research question: "What are the differences in characteristics of public governance practices between state administration and local-self-government?". In the continuation, we present a literature review (Section 2), constituting the theoretical background with an overview of public governance models (Section 2.1). A presentation of the empirical studies conducted by different scholars examining the presence and influence of those models in public administrations in practice follows (Section 2.2). We continue with the materials and methods in Section 3. Section 3.1 presents the study participants and procedure. Measures are presented in Section 3.2 and statistical analysis in Section 3.3. In continuation, the study's main results are presented (Section 4), followed by a discussion (Section 5) and a conclusion (Section 6).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Overview of Public Governance Models

The development of public governance models tries to follow trends in the overall evolution of the contextual environment. Public organisations have constantly been transforming due to the requirement to evolve and adapt to society, the economic, and political environment, and even more so in recent decades due to globalisation and increasingly intertwined complex challenges like climate change, migration, digitalisation, etc. Today, models face various ideas that are sometimes in conflict, with numerous different struc-

tures, demands, and cultural elements (Kickert 2001; Iacovino et al. 2017) as reforms are not replacing each other, but adding to previous ones, leading to hybrid administrative systems (Christensen 2012). A vital point adding to the complexity of public sector governance models is the process of layering (Olsen 2009, 2010) or sedimentation (Streeck and Thelen 2005), meaning that when a particular new model is embraced, it is not very likely that it will directly replace all of the previous mechanisms, principles, ideas, and practices. Throughout history, new models have emerged, and new developments have accumulated, yet specific trends of the earlier models remain relevant and are now intertwined with the new ideas.

In the literature, we can observe three main pillars in the development of public governance models, starting with traditional models (Weberian public administration and its “Neo” successor), followed by the managerial or market models, the primary representative being New Public Management (NPM), and the third pillar, for which the scientific community has yet to arrive at a consensus. The shifting agenda has seen different emphases for the third pillar—governance, partnerships and networks, transparency, e-government, and the general term post-NPM. The third wave between the 1990s and 2010 is seen as “a wave of ideas” and not as one dominant model (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Osborne (2006) and Iacovino et al. (2017) note that public administration has gone through three different pillars: (i) the old public administration model; (ii) the New Public Management model; and (iii) the public governance model. Bryson et al. (2014) present public value governance as an emerging view of public administration after the NPM model. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) outlined, besides the traditional Weberian model and NPM model, the New Weberian State, the Networks model, and Governance, highlighting New Public Governance and Digital-Era Governance as two variants. They were reluctant to establish the third pillar or “wave” directly. The shifting agenda has seen different emphases—governance, partnerships and networks, transparency, e-government through to the general term post-NPM. The third wave between the 1990s and 2010 is seen as “a wave of ideas” and not as one dominant model (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Meuleman (2008) wrote about several governance styles that have been distinguished but grouped them into three “ideal-types” of governance considered to have contributed to Western public administrations since the 1950s: hierarchical, market, and network governance. Lampropoulou and Oikonomou (2018) presented three pillars. The first two are again the traditional model (as well as Weberian, the Napoleonic tradition, Continental, and Public Service), and the managerial or economic model is New Public Management. The third pillar is a mix of governance (Good, Digital-Era, Network, Interactive) and Hybrid (New Public Service, New Weberian State, Public Value) models, similar to the summary that follows.

An overview of public governance models encompasses three main pillars (see Table 1), akin to the outlines above of the mentioned scholars, which are proposed following an extensive literature review: (i) Traditional public administration and management (Weberian public administration); (ii) Managerial models (New Public Management); and (iii) Governance and Hybrid models (Neo-Weberian State, Good Governance, New Public Governance, Digital-Era Governance, and Alternative/Hybrid models (Interactive, Network, Collaborative Governance, New Public Service, Public Value)).

**Table 1.** Summary of the literature review on public governance models.

	<b>Traditional Public Administration and Management</b>	<b>Managerial Models</b>	<b>Governance &amp; Hybrid Models</b>			
	<b>Weberian Public Administration</b>	<b>New Public Management (NPM)</b>	<b>Neo-Weberian State</b>	<b>Good Governance/ New Public Governance</b>	<b>Digital-Era Governance</b>	<b>Alternative/Hybrid (Interactive, Network, Collaborative Governance, New Public Service, Public Value, ... )</b>
Core claim	Stable, ordered systems of authority and hierarchical control with clear rules.	The government should operate like a business organisation and utilise entrepreneurial-based techniques.	Modernises the traditional state apparatus to become more professional, efficient, and responsive.	Governance is more inclusive and “good” for a specific outcome (e.g., economic growth, democracy, ... ).	Emphasises technology-enabled joined-up governance and extensive digitalisation of operations.	Holistic, better informed, inter-organisational governance, more flexible, many different actors, building mutual trust.
Main period	From the late nineteenth century to the late 1970s/early 1980s	The 1980s and 1990s	The late 1990s to present	From the 2000s and on	From 2005 on	Since the recent financial crisis
Main principles	Accountability through hierarchy, the rule of law, equality before the law, objectivity, functional specialisation.	Efficiency, effectiveness, economy, deregulation, competitiveness, performance measurement, decentralisation, cost reduction, entrepreneurship.	The rule of law, reliability, openness, accountability, inter-institutional networks and partnerships, focus on results.	Participation, transparency, responsiveness, equity, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, equality, credibility.	Reintegration, holism, digitalisation, citizen-oriented, responsiveness, e-enforcement, transparency.	Trust, transformation, empathy, sustainable relations, a collaboration of public and private, shared values, consultation, participation, digitalisation, integration.
Role of the state	Formulating and implementing policy, serving, strong steering, and regulating presence.	Shrinking the state, shifting towards privatisation and quasi-privatisation, away from core government institutions.	Reaffirmation of the role of the state.	Facilitating coordination, strategically developing partnerships for co-decision-making.	Inclusive digital state: inclusion within the governing process of other social actors using electronic channels.	Collaborative, oriented to critical societal challenges, and engaging all levels of governance.

Table 1. Cont.

	<b>Traditional Public Administration and Management</b>	<b>Managerial Models</b>	<b>Governance &amp; Hybrid Models</b>			
	<b>Weberian Public Administration</b>	<b>New Public Management (NPM)</b>	<b>Neo-Weberian State</b>	<b>Good Governance/ New Public Governance</b>	<b>Digital-Era Governance</b>	<b>Alternative/Hybrid (Interactive, Network, Collaborative Governance, New Public Service, Public Value, . . . )</b>
Role of an official	Ensures that rules and appropriate procedures are followed.	Empowering public servants and increasing managerial quality, providing services, and acting like entrepreneurs.	Professional culture of quality and service, supplemented in appropriate cases by market mechanisms.	Protection of public interest and advocacy of privatisation.	Efficient and fast electronic service delivery and consultation.	Creating and guiding networks of deliberation. Conciliating, mediating, or even an adjudicating role.
Role of PA service recipient	Legislation addressee	Customer, consumer, client	Consumer: meeting citizens' needs and wishes. Professional culture of quality and service.	Active citizen, co-decision maker, citizen's participation	Active citizen, co-decision maker, e-participation	Active citizen, co-production: citizens as problem-solvers and co-creators
Organisational structure	Rational-functional, hierarchical and rule-based organisation, rule-driven authority, several levels of execution and management.	Internal reorganisation of administrative structures, modernisation of resource management, the separation between politics and administration, favouring market-type mechanisms.	Reaffirmation of the role of the state, democracy, law and citizen-state relationship + orientation towards citizens' needs, achievements of results, consultation.	Collaboration, management, deliberation arrangements, delivery, and engagement with users.	Reintegration, needs-based holism—"end to end" reengineering processes, digitisation changes—productivity gains from IT.	Holistic organisation and governance with a new working way. Depends on a suitable organisational form—developing IT and intelligent systems/data mining.
Administrative culture	Civil service ethics	Entrepreneurial spirit	Meeting citizens' needs	Open government/mixed approach	Open government/mixed approach	Contribute to society, creating public value

Table 1. Cont.

	<b>Traditional Public Administration and Management</b>	<b>Managerial Models</b>	<b>Governance &amp; Hybrid Models</b>			
	<b>Weberian Public Administration</b>	<b>New Public Management (NPM)</b>	<b>Neo-Weberian State</b>	<b>Good Governance/ New Public Governance</b>	<b>Digital-Era Governance</b>	<b>Alternative/Hybrid (Interactive, Network, Collaborative Governance, New Public Service, Public Value, ...)</b>
<b>Limitations/ Failures</b>	Rigid rules, lack of managerial discretion, complicated incentive system, impossible to fire incompetent workers.	It does not function if lack of authority, financial interests over public interest, performance indicators, overlooking social recognition, citizens are seen as customers.	Rediscovering prior modes of governance as new ones, could go back to a dirigiste, top-down, rigid form of governance.	Challenging participation/coordination mechanisms, lack of democratic control due to the delegation of power, principles are challenging to define.	Digitalisation causing fears: loss of confidentiality, increased control by the government, security concerns. Implementation challenges, lacking empirical evidence.	Lacking theoretical and practical grounds, causing fears: loss of confidentiality, increased control by government, security concerns.
<b>Sources</b>	(Weber 1946; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Lampropoulou and Oikonomou 2018; Wojciech 2017; Bauer and Trondal 2015; Hughes 2003)	(Hood 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Pollitt 1990; Bach and Bordogna 2011; Bovaird and Löffler 2003; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Dunleavy and Hood 1994)	(Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Lynn 2008)	(OECD 2004; Peters 2012; Bevir 2011; Osborne 2010; Torfing and Triantafillou 2013)	(Dunleavy et al. 2006; Margetts and Dunleavy 2013; Dunleavy and Margetts 2015)	(Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Moore 1995; Benington and Moore 2011; Meuleman 2008; Torfing et al. 2012; Emerson et al. 2012; Ansell and Gash 2008)

The first pillar, the Weberian model of bureaucracy (Weber 1946), took hold in what Hood (1995) called the “progressive era of public administration” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and remained very much present until the late 1970s. It strongly inspired most Western administrative systems (Lampropoulou and Oikonomou 2018). Its main principles include accountability through hierarchy, the rule of law, legitimacy, uniformity, standardisation of procedures, limited communication channels, division of labour, etc. (Weber 1946; Wojciech 2017; Dunleavy and Margetts 2015). Even though this model is already around 100 years old, some elements remain essential today, such as hierarchy, professionalism, and the political neutrality of the public administration that operates according to legislation (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Bauer and Trondal 2015; Ropret and Aristovnik 2019; Kukovič and Justinek 2020). However, theory and practice had created deviations that questioned the credibility of traditional bureaucracies. Isolated governance is a limitation since viewing the needs of the citizens and businesses as equivalent seems to be less critical. Some elements were becoming irrelevant for the modern challenges of society, including low productivity and efficiency, flexibility limitations, and the weak response to the increasing economic needs, which gradually led to the model being reconsidered (Hughes 2003).

As traditional bureaucracy became ever more criticised, modern governance recognised the need for public bureaucracy to shift to using private sector techniques, more systemic and inclusive approaches, with economics and management moving into the centre of the theoretical debate on reorganising public administration (Hood 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Great Britain and New Zealand were pioneers in New Public Management (Hood 1991; Lane 2000), which later spread to many other countries and gained real momentum during the 1980s and 1990s. It was a new way of public sector governance that takes entrepreneurial/managerial methods from the private sector and applies them in public institutions, treating citizens as customers with priorities shifting towards the productivity of public bureaucracies and management, resulting in the “managerialism” concept (Pollitt 1990; Bach and Bordogna 2011; Bovaird and Löffler 2003; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). However, the implementation of New Public Management attracted concerns and criticism regarding its short-term perspective, primarily budget reduction at the expense of quality standards in the health, education, and environment policy fields (Larbi 1999). Furthermore, corruption, democratic accountability, and questionable ethics in the public sector also became a concern (Dunleavy and Hood 1994).

Occurring at a similar time (in the late 1990s) in continental Europe, we may observe another distinct reform model—the Neo-Weberian State, including “Weberian elements” with “neo” elements. The Weberian components reaffirm the state’s role in solutions to the new issues, affirm a representative democracy and administrative law, and continue the idea of public service. The “neo” elements denote a shift from an internal orientation to an external one and meeting citizens’ needs, strengthening representative democracy with mechanisms for consultation and stressing the achievement of results (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Lynn 2008).

After reservations about New Public Management started to accumulate after a decade of trial implementation, countries in continental Europe decided on changes to the Weberian model, including new elements for more contemporary governance, such as Good Governance (OECD 2004), New Public Governance (Osborne 2006), Digital-Era Governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006), etc. All these share the view that decision-making processes are shifting towards inter-institutional cooperation involving several actors.

Indeed, in the 2000s, Good Governance emerged after gaining significance mainly through policy analysis and interdisciplinary application. It emphasises eight fundamental principles, including participation, the rule of law, efficiency, and effectiveness (OECD 2004). It is a governmental “well-functioning bureaucracy” with its administration operations, including other societal networks, facilitating coordination instead of a monopolistic hierarchical authority held by state administration (Peters 2012). Good Governance sug-

gests operating through networking and open structures rather than a top-down approach (Bevir 2011).

In addition, New Public Governance is derived from network theory (Osborne 2010). Its main principles focus on public-private collaboration, stakeholders' participation, coordination, better service delivery, results orientation, and accountability standards (Torfing and Triantafillou 2013). Osborne (2010) defines it as a model in which numerous interdependent actors deliver public services, and multiple processes inform the policymaking system. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) highlighted an important issue regarding New Public Governance being a comprehensive and abstract model, too general and providing little explanation of how, why, and when specific things tend to unfold. Nonetheless, it concentrates on the core modern features of politics and society, such as social actors sharing power with the government in many informal ways (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).

Digital-Era governance encompasses cooperation between the citizens and public administration as having a vital role in Good Governance, which previous models had not achieved. It also places digital technologies at the centre of administrative organisational structures (Baheer et al. 2020; Wojciech 2017). The online worlds of government and citizens are surprisingly separate, even after more than a decade of internet use, with the administration not taking advantage of big data access and citizens still not being able to communicate digitally with government, businesses, and other social entities (Dunleavy and Margetts 2015). Digital-Era Governance highlights the need to introduce a new integrated public governance architecture to respond to the tensions arising between digitally advanced citizens who are becoming ever more demanding and a public administration still operating according to the previous models (Wojciech 2017). The key features of the Digital-Era Governance model are reintegration (public administration architecture), needs-based holism (citizen-centeredness), and digitalisation change. Reintegration refers to the fragmentation of public services that characterised New Public Management. Needs-based holism dictates the simplification and change of the public administration–citizens relationship. A shift in digitalisation leads to online public services without intermediaries (Cho and Melisa 2021; Dunleavy et al. 2006; Margetts and Dunleavy 2013; Wojciech 2017).

Recently, some new model propositions emerged in hybrid versions or modifications of earlier models that are often envisioned as prototypes (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). The New Public Service model (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000) highlights the role of government to serve the citizens' needs rather than technically and managerially direct society. With democratic citizenship at the centre, this model implies a political relationship between citizens and government. The Public Value model (Moore 1995) adopts similar views to the New Weberian State model. The core of this model is to serve the citizens' needs, with the most important features being public consultation, political legitimisation, and placing the social perspective in administrative actions. Public value can be achieved with the "strategic triangle of organisational capacity, results, and stakeholders from the public, private, and third sectors" (Benington and Moore 2011). Network governance is characterised by building mutual trust and is based on empathy, understanding interdependency, and creating consensus (Meuleman 2008). Interactive governance encompasses the complex interaction process between social and political actors with diverging interests, promoting and achieving shared objectives by exchanging, and deploying a range of ideas, rules, and resources (Torfing et al. 2012). Similarly, collaborative governance brings public and private stakeholders together in collective forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision-making and to carry out a public purpose that could not be achieved otherwise (Emerson et al. 2012; Ansell and Gash 2008).

## 2.2. Overview of Practical Applications of Different Public Governance Models

Following the theoretical overview of public governance models, this section examines the presence and influence of those models in public administrations in practice and the extent to which they have been empirically verified. Scholars have studied public



governance models and how they apply to and influence various levels and different aspects of public administration.

[Peralta and Rubalcaba \(2021\)](#) looked at what determines the use of innovation practices in a public administration. In their research paper, PLS–SEM analysis of a sample of 227 Spanish public innovation managers is conducted, showing that governance models are a very relevant determinant, among others, that influences the use of innovation practices. The traditional public administration model and the New Public Management model are prevalent in public organisations in Spain. The interviewees confirmed that the mode of production of innovations involves the citizenry considerably in the co-design and co-implementation of new services in the tool selection stage of the project. However, public managers used a mixed approach, where the tools for bottom-up innovation were combined with top-down practices. The theoretical predictions of [Desmarchelier et al. \(2019\)](#) made using the Public Service Logic model, one of the Hybrid models being associated with collaborative tools, were blurred with the results of this analysis. Although the public managers in this survey mainly worked in a Traditional public administration and New Public Management environment, conventional tools like polls, surveys, and public-private partnerships were avoided, and a combination of collaborative tools (open space, world café) and modern top-down tools (agile methods, design-thinking) were used.

[Iacovino et al. \(2017\)](#) analysed different points of view in their case study that produced two main results. Regarding the first hypothesis, they verified that the old public administration (OPA), named the Weberian model or the traditional public governance model in other studies, New Public Management and Public Governance backgrounds coexist in the same context (in their case, the Tuscany Region), and at the same time. The results showed that various parts of the regional public administration had a different prevalence of each public governance model: experience of top management still matters in Weberian model background, tendencies were found in the environment of policymakers and top management expectations, and public governance elements in documents, acts, and regional laws. Concerning the second hypothesis, a layering process is used when new reforms are added to old reforms, creating a complex and hybrid reform overview. Hence, the elements of different models complement and do not substitute each other ([Streeck and Thelen 2005](#); [Christensen and Lægveid 2010](#)). New Public Management or post-NPM reforms were implemented in a public administration environment with Weberian elements still prevailing, like the traditional bureaucratic forms of specialisation and coordination.

We were particularly interested in empirical studies where scholars looked for possible differences in the presence of public governance models with respect to the level of public administration (state vs. local self-government). Findings by [Orelli et al. \(2016\)](#) show that municipalities in Greece and Italy widely engaged with management accounting techniques, since innovations in the accounting area were often the first phase of reforming governments. Management accounting is a crucial ingredient in the managerial decision-making process and is thus an essential condition for a prosperous New Public Management reform ([Luder and Jones 2003](#); [Pettersen 2001](#)). The study by [Kuhlmann et al. \(2008\)](#) similarly showed that local authorities in Germany had promoted the modernisation of their administrations from the year 2000 on, taking the new Steering model (the German version of New Public Management) as their reference modernisation model that became an essential template for modernising local government across Germany.

Research in Slovenian public administration is limited to determining the layering and presence of public governance models on various levels (state vs. local self-government). Differences between the state administration and local self-government among different public governance models can be found in theory and practice, as described by [Orelli et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Kuhlmann et al. \(2008\)](#), given the fact that local administrations tend to be more creative, receptive, and innovative ([Iacovino et al. 2017](#); [Cepiku et al. 2008](#)). Hence, our paper seeks to add a glimpse at some new findings to address the current research gap concerning the extent to which different public governance models can be found on various levels of Slovenian public administration.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Study Participants and Procedure

The target population was constituted by public managers of Slovenian public administration institutions. The respondents in the target population were recruited by non-probabilistic, convenience sampling facilitated by promoting the survey at selected scientific and professional events. Encompassing numerous aspects of the administrative organisation, which were tailored to the core organisational elements and principles of public administration governance, a comprehensive questionnaire was prepared to address selected authoritative and service-oriented public administration segments so as to obtain information on the current and optimum state of operation and governance. The survey was conducted during 2019 through personal interviews with public managers, which allowed for a critical assessment of individual question items. Participants were assured that the survey was strictly confidential and anonymous. The final sample consisted of 81 participants or public managers (see Table 2). Finally, the respondents were not obliged to complete the questionnaire in total, meaning the number of respondents varied by question.

**Table 2.** Sociodemographic characteristics of the survey respondents and institutions.

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Number (%/Std. Dev.)
Gender	
Male	39 (48.1)
Female	42 (51.9)
Years employed at the institution	
Mean (SD)	12.6 (9.6)
Years employed at the current workplace	
Mean (SD)	6.1 (6.7)
Years employed at the previous workplace	
Mean (SD)	7.6 (6.2)
Total work experience in years	
Mean (SD)	25.9 (9.0)
Level of education	
Undergraduate degree	42 (51.9)
Postgraduate degree (specialisation, MSc, PhD)	39 (48.1)
Type of institutions	
Ministries–directorates	29 (35.8)
Bodies within ministries	11 (13.6)
Financial administration offices	10 (12.3)
Administrative units	16 (19.8)
Municipal administrations	15 (18.5)
Level of public administration	
State administration	66 (81.5)
Local self-government	15 (18.5)

Note: The final sample consists of 81 participants.

According to the sociodemographic characteristics, the sample's structure was as follows. Considering gender, 48.1% of the respondents were male and 51.9% were female. The average years of employment at the institution was 12.6, the average years employed in the current and previous workplace were 6.1 and 7.6, respectively, while the average total work experience was 25.9 years. With respect to the level of education, 51.9% of the respondents held an undergraduate degree, and 48.1% had a postgraduate degree. Most respondents came from ministries–directorates (35.8%), followed by administrative units (19.8%), municipal administrations (18.5%), bodies within ministries (13.6%) and financial administration offices (12.3%). Namely, the largest share of the respondents came from state administration (81.5%), i.e., ministries–directorates, bodies within ministries,

financial administration offices and administrative units, while the remainder were from local self-government (18.5%), i.e., municipal administrations.

### 3.2. Measures

The data were obtained through a comprehensive questionnaire composed of 115 closed-ended question items, whereby six questions referred to respondents' general demographic characteristics and 109 questions referred to elements of the institution's functioning, divided into seven thematic sections. The questionnaire's content was formulated based on a theoretical literature review by academic experts in the economic, legal, and public administration fields, which was further tested, revised and evaluated by considering practical experiences and recommendations from public managers.

The demographic section covered demographic data on gender, years employed at the institution, years employed at the current workplace, years employed at the previous workplace, total work experience in years, and level of education. The first thematic section comprised 11 question items on values and goals in preparing the institution for the near or distant future. The second section was about leadership and strategy and included 11 question items on the ability of leaders to pursue the strategy and guide employees to achieve the institution's goals. This was followed by a section with 21 questions on structure and processes addressing the static and dynamic aspects of the institution's functioning. The fourth section concerned organisational culture and had nine questions on values, attitudes, and practices that characterise an institution. The fifth section was about changes and development and included seven questions on the institution's ability to adapt to changes that affect how its functioning thrives. The following section concerned cooperation with the environment with 37 questions about direct stakeholders' involvement in decision-making processes concerning the institution's functioning. Finally, the last section included 13 questions on results, representing achievements expressed in the form of various quantitative or qualitative indicators.

Individual aspects of a public manager's perception of elements of the institution's functioning (i.e., agreement or frequency) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (lowest) value to 5 (highest value) (Croasmun and Ostrom 2011). Since the surveyed types of institutions varied in nature, an extra option "not applicable" was offered.

### 3.3. Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was performed using the statistical data processing package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) over three consecutive phases. The first phase involved identifying appropriate items that best reflect the characteristics of the corresponding public governance model, i.e., the Neo-Weberian model (WEB), New Public Management (NPM), Good Governance (GG), Digital-Era Governance (DEG), and the Hybrid model (HYB), which have the nature of latent constructs. In order to provide sufficient coverage of the constructs' theoretical domain (Hair et al. 2010), the five most relevant items for each public governance model were identified (see Table A1 in Appendix A). The process of determining the most appropriate items entailed both theoretical examination, including the examination of the most prominent public governance principles within the individual public governance model, and reliability analysis, which was employed to determine the internal consistency of individual public governance models. Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the most popular method of examining reliability in the social and organisational sciences (Bonett and Wright 2015). Examination of Cronbach's alpha coefficient reveals its value lies in the range between 0.521 (HYB) and 0.733 (GG). However, this indicator must be interpreted with caution (Žukauskas et al. 2018), as its value depends not only on the strength of correlations between the items but also on the number of items on the scale (Netemeyer et al. 2003). Namely, despite the value below 0.60 being considered as unacceptable (Churchill and Peter 1984), lower values are (at least conditionally) acceptable when the scale consists of only a few items (Hair et al. 2010) or the newly designed instruments (Hair et al. 2021). Accordingly, the

value between 0.50 and 0.75 indicates a moderately reliable scale for the corresponding public governance models (Hinton et al. 2014). Accordingly, it was possible to proceed with the second phase of calculating mean values for each public governance model. Finally, in order to identify differences in mean values between state administration and local self-government, an independent samples *t*-test was performed. This parametric statistical technique is considered a very robust method and is the most commonly used method for detecting differences in mean values between two unrelated samples (Rasch et al. 2007).

#### 4. Results

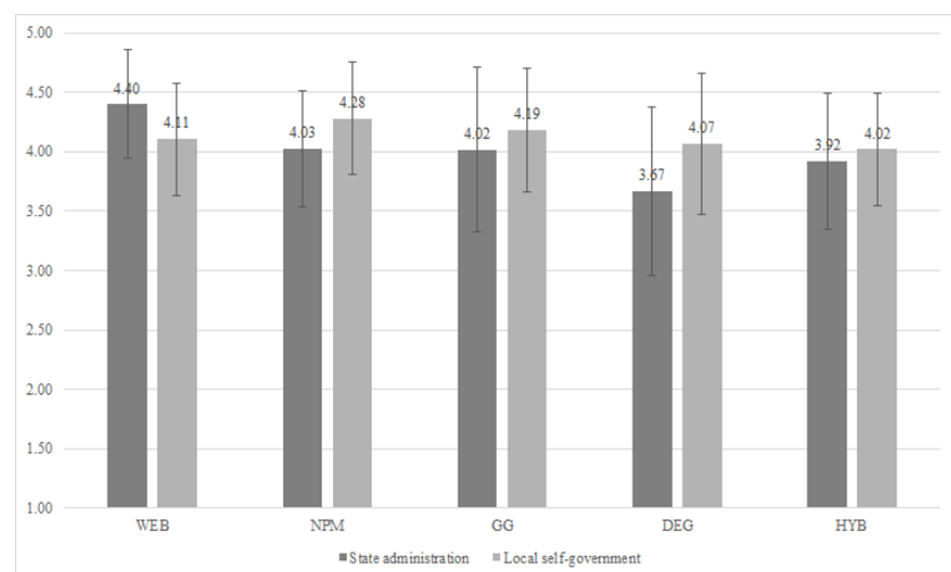
Initially, the paper examines the overall presence of different public governance models in Slovenian public administration. Despite the overlap of specific characteristics across administrative traditions, the descriptive statistics (see Table 3) show that the Neo-Weberian model generally remains the basis of the public administration in the country, followed by New Public Management, Good Governance and the ICT-driven public governance models like Digital-Era Governance and the Hybrid model.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics.

Model	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
WEB	4.35	0.47	3.00	5.00
NPM	4.07	0.49	2.60	4.80
GG	4.05	0.66	2.25	5.00
DEG	3.74	0.70	1.67	5.00
HYB	3.94	0.55	1.75	5.00

Note: WEB—(Neo-)Weberian model; NPM—New Public Management; GG—Good Governance; DEG—Digital-Era Governance; HYB—Hybrid model.

The further examination considers that various segments of Slovenian public administration possess different characteristics closely related to their particular area of operation. Accordingly, a comparison of mean values was utilised to establish differences in the presence of different public administration models between state administration (characterised by centralisation and a top-down organisational design) and local self-government (characterised by decentralisation and a bottom-up organisational design) institutions (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The presence of public governance models in selected segments of public administration. Note: WEB—Neo-Weberian model; NPM—New Public Management; GG—Good Governance; DEG—Digital-Era Governance; HYB—Hybrid model. The presentation includes means and standard deviations.

The descriptive results reveal differences between state administration and local self-government across various public governance models. In order to empirically verify whether these differences are statistically significant, an independent samples *t*-test was performed, whereby Levene's test was performed to check whether the assumption of equal variances applies. Based on the *p*-value of Levene's test ( $p > 0.10$ ), it may be concluded that the variance in all examined constructs of state administration institutions is not different from those of local self-government institutions. Therefore, the corresponding variant of the *t*-test assuming equal variances was used (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** The results of Levene's test for equality of variances and *t*-test for equality of means.

Model	Levene's Test		Mean Diff.	T-Test	
	F	<i>p</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
WEB	0.048	0.827	0.293	2.230	0.029 *
NPM	0.001	0.979	−0.254	−1.826	0.072 *
GG	0.714	0.401	−0.169	−0.888	0.377
DEG	0.492	0.485	−0.399	−2.020	0.047 *
HYB	0.640	0.426	−0.102	−0.641	0.523

Note: WEB—Neo-Weberian model; NPM—New Public Management; GG—Good Governance; DEG—Digital-Era Governance; HYB—Hybrid model. Asterisk (\*) indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.010$ .

The results show that significant differences in public governance practices exist between selected segments of Slovenian public administration. Regarding the Neo-Weberian model, a significant difference is apparent in the mean values for state administration ( $M = 4.40$ ;  $SD = 0.46$ ) and local self-government ( $M = 4.11$ ;  $SD = 0.47$ ), revealing the practices of the traditional public governance model are more prominent in the state administration institutions. When considering New Public Management, the results also indicate a significant difference between state administration ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $SD = 0.49$ ) and local self-government institutions ( $M = 4.28$ ;  $SD = 0.47$ ), suggesting that managerial public governance practices are more present in the latter. Moreover, the significant difference between state administration ( $M = 3.67$ ;  $SD = 0.71$ ) and local self-government ( $M = 4.07$ ;  $SD = 0.59$ ) is also observed for Digital-Era Governance, indicating the latter public governance model elements are more prominent in institutions on the local self-government level. However, despite local self-government achieving higher average values than state administration for Good Governance ( $M = 4.19$ ;  $SD = 0.52$  and  $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ , respectively) and the Hybrid model ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = 0.47$  and  $M = 3.92$ ;  $SD = 0.57$ , respectively), the results suggest there is no significant difference between these two segments of Slovenian public administration. Briefly, traditional public administration practices seem to be more prominent in state administration, while managerial approaches to public governance, alongside e-government initiatives, are more utilised in local self-government. This is further confirmed by ranking public governance practices within individual segments of the Slovenian public administration. On the one hand, for the state administration, the highest average value is observed for (Neo-)Weberian model elements followed by New Public Management, Good Governance, Hybrid model and Digital-Era Governance practices. However, on the other hand, for local self-government, the highest average value is observed for elements of New Public Management, followed by Good Governance, Neo-Weberian model, Digital-Era Governance, and Hybrid model elements.

## 5. Discussion

Synthesising the theoretical and empirical findings points to the complex situation wherein several public sector governance models are simultaneously dynamically present in practice. Recalling the theories of [Dunleavy et al. \(2006\)](#), [Pollitt and Bouckaert \(2011\)](#), [Olsen \(2010\)](#), [Christensen \(2012\)](#) and [Osborne \(2006\)](#) regarding the complexity of governance models today, it is unlikely to expect all previous principles and mechanisms will be directly replaced when a new model is accepted. This will lead to specific influences

of the previous model(s) remaining and being intertwined with new ideas and theories on the process of layering each model on top of another. In the empirical findings for Slovenian public administration, we may observe that the mentioned theoretical points are found in praxis today. Our results show the characteristics of at least five different public governance models characteristics are present in Slovenian public administration, where the basis of the state administration institutions are the practices of the Neo-Weberian model. Given that today several of its elements remain indispensable, like the hierarchy, professionalism, and political neutrality of the public administration operating according to legislation (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Bauer and Trondal 2015; Ropret and Aristovnik 2019), followed by the practices of New Public Management, Good Governance and Hybrid models. Iacovino et al. (2017) found similar results in their case study of the Tuscany Region where traditional public administration, New Public Management and public governance backgrounds coexist in the same context and at the same time. They also established the different prevalence of each model in various parts of the public administration, which led us to examine our findings further, given their similarity, that different segments of Slovenian public administration hold different characteristics, which are closely related to their particular area of operation.

Characteristics and practices of the traditional public governance model (Neo-Weberian model) are more prominent in the state administration, characterised by centralisation with a top-down organisational design because state administration institutions place greater emphasis on internal control and strictly follow internal rules/guidelines/policies for employee development. The results show that managerial public governance practices and Digital-Era Governance elements are more prominent in institutions on the local self-government level. In 1994, the functions of municipalities (local self-government) were strictly separated from those of the state administration, constituting the most radical public administration reform in Slovenia thus far (Kovač and Virant 2011; Kovač and Jukić 2016). A central assumption in the research by Kovač et al. (2016) is that heads of the selected agencies are generally aware of the critical elements of good administration, and they pursue them daily; yet, more elements of Good Governance are implemented in service-oriented authorities with less conflict between public and private interests. Local self-government pays more attention to individual elements as well as to good administration as a whole. In addition to compliance with regulations, they develop a partnership approach to the parties, especially in terms of openness and thus higher ultimate performance. This is because of the clear division of responsibilities between state administration and local self-government as the Local Self-Government Act in Slovenia limits the state rather than the municipality. In other words, it prevents the state from interfering in the municipalities' governing sphere. This allows the municipality to obtain the functions, under authentic competence, that are crucial for the life and work of inhabitants of the municipality. Following this approach, the functions can be exercised in a more effective and rational way within the local community rather than through state administration (Vlaj 1997; Kukovič et al. 2016). Interested stakeholders find information about operations without significant effort, either on websites, published reports, or directly from the institution. The organisational structure enables the fast transfer of information to employees, where that structure embodies typical principles of the New Public Management model. Moreover, information is available to the public through all modern information and communication channels, and critical business processes are supported by state-of-the-art digital solutions, also reflecting the principles of Digital-Era Governance.

Our findings are again in line with other empirical studies; for example, Greek, Italian, and German local governments have also noticeably promoted the modernisation of their local administrations (Orelli et al. 2016; Kuhlmann et al. 2008). Differences between state administration and local self-government across the public governance models may be observed because local administrations tend to be more creative, receptive, and innovative (Iacovino et al. 2017; Cepiku et al. 2008). However, both public administration levels should follow an agile approach when thinking about changes (Mergel et al. 2021). Contemporary

local governance exceeds the legal aspects with its dedication to local users, solving their problems and fostering the community's socio-economic development. Indicating, besides authoritative decision-making (e.g., local urban planning, local tax setting, defining the parking regime, social benefits, etc.), local self-government institutions strengthen their legitimacy by providing quality public services and promoting democracy with public participation and co-decision-making on the local level (Kovač 2014; Benčina et al. 2021), namely, utilising the main principles of Good Governance, the New Public Management model, Digital-Era Governance and even the Hybrid models.

This study suffers from limitations concerning the respondents' subjective evaluations, which could lead to elements in the survey being misinterpreted. It is reasonable to assume that some public managers might under/overestimate individual aspects while assessing the survey items. However, all items used to measure the state and opportunities of governance were carefully discussed with the respondents to limit bias. Another limitation is the small sample size, especially at the local self-government level, which could affect the reliability of the results. However, this limitation was addressed to some extent by assuring the representativeness within individual subgroups of institutions by considering their size and geographical location. Finally, the small sample size also makes it challenging to utilise sophisticated empirical considerations. This issue is to some extent controlled by utilising statistical approaches, which are at least conditionally suitable for small samples.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings are significant given the apparent lack of empirical studies analysing the presence of public governance models in public administration institutions, primarily through the lens of a comparison between state administration and local self-government. Despite different administrative responsibilities, the results emphasise the need for Slovenian state administration to take a step towards modern governance approaches that allow for more holistic, informed, inter-organisational and flexible governance by including different stakeholders and building mutual trust, making it more effective suitable and prepared for future societal challenges. Furthermore, the study can be taken as a base for further international, time-dimensional, and inter-sectional comparisons and can be considered to evaluate the progress of the current public administration reforms and their development for the future.

## 6. Conclusions

Today, public sector governance models are roughly a broad-ranging mix of previous legacy models. They entail the interweaving of Weber's tendencies, characteristics of New Public Management, Post-NPM and Good Governance with specific trends of the Digital Governance model as characterised by different standout features depending on the country and, as the results of this paper show, also depending on the level of public administration. Public organisations have been transforming in recent decades due to the need for evolution and adaptation to society, to the economic and political environment of the post-industrial world. Today, such organisations encounter various ideas that sometimes conflict with different structures and elements and have become complex. An important aspect that adds to the complexity of public sector governance models is that when a particular new model is embraced, it is not very likely that it will directly replace all of the earlier mechanisms, principles, ideas, and practices.

Throughout history, new models have emerged, and new developments accumulated, but specific trends of the previous models have remained relevant and are now interwoven with new ideas. This is known as the process of layering, and empirical findings from Slovenian public administration demonstrate that the stated theoretical points can be found in praxis today. Our research detected elements of different public governance models are present in Slovenian public administration, with the basis of the state administration institutions being the practices of the Neo-Weberian model, characterised by centralisation with a top-down organisational design. Managerial public governance and Digital-Era Governance elements are more prominent in institutions on the local self-government level. More elements of Good Governance and Hybrid governance are implemented in

service-oriented authorities that see less conflict between public and private interests. Local self-government pays more attention to individual elements and good administration as a whole.

The evolution of public governance models tries to follow trends in overall environmental development, and thus the most recent ideas seek to tackle modern changes and requirements confronting society such as citizen engagement, globalisation, omnipresent information technology etc. This paper is one of our initiatives to provide scientific support to Slovenia and other countries searching for the most efficient governance approaches. We explored the current theoretical paradigms and administrative practices in our country. This will offer public managers additional resources for democratic and efficient governing using the most contemporary elements, with Good Governance as an umbrella doctrine, incorporating the Neo-Weberian and New Public Management legacies and future digital and collaborative perspectives. The results we reported also provide policymakers with in-depth insights, which may help determine the trajectories of future public administration reforms.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Items used in the measurement of public governance models.

Item	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Neo-Weberian model (WEB)		0.686
The functioning of our institution is based on clear rules.	web_1	
As a manager, I ensure consistent adherence to the rules in our institution.	web_2	
The Human Resources Management System (HRM) contains internal rules/guidelines/policies for employee development.	web_3	
Our institution places great emphasis on internal control.	web_4	
As a manager, I have a complete overview of the work of employees.	web_5	



Table A1. Cont.

Item	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
New Public Management (NPM)		0.548
In the functioning of our institution, we emulate all relevant good practices from the private sector.	npm_1	
We do not duplicate key information within a single communication channel ("once-only" principle).	npm_2	
Interested stakeholders find information about our operations without significant effort (websites, published reports, directly in the institution, . . . ).	npm_3	
The organisational structure enables fast transfer of information to employees.	npm_4	
When posting information about our functioning, we do not focus only on (legally) necessary content.	npm_5	
Good Governance (GG)		0.733
We cooperate with the public directly and not through other (indirectly involved) organisations/institutions.	gg_1	
We inform the public about all possible forms of cooperation with our institution.	gg_2	
We ensure intensive interaction between us and all relevant stakeholders in making key decisions.	gg_3	
In making key decisions, we are committed to reaching a consensus of relevant stakeholders that is in the interest of the entire community.	gg_4	
In implementing key decisions, we are committed to reaching a consensus of all relevant stakeholders.	gg_5	
Digital-Era Governance (DEG)		0.654
Our information system combines all the data necessary for our functioning.	deg_1	
Information about our operations is available to the public through all modern information and communication channels.	deg_2	
Our key business processes are supported by state-of-the-art digital solutions.	deg_3	
We use modern digital solutions when working with customers.	deg_4	
Our information system combines all the data necessary for our functioning.	deg_5	
Hybrid model (HYB)		0.521
Information about our operations is given to the public in an understandable way.	hyb_1	
The public is aware of key developments in our institution.	hyb_2	
The process of cooperation between us and the public is based on a continuous basis.	hyb_3	
The public is directly involved in key decision-making and does not only have a consultative role.	hyb_4	
When making decisions, we consider all key (environmental, economic, social) aspects of sustainable development.	hyb_5	

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