

National, International and Transnational Constructions of New Public Management

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How extensive are reforms and how extensive are the effects? Layers of explanations

New Public Management (NPM) is a label used both to define a general trend towards changing the style of governance and administration in the public sector and to describe a number of reforms that were carried out in several countries during the 1980s and the 1990s. New Zealand and Australia have been highlighted as countries where extensive NPM reforms have been implemented. In Sweden, it is said, there has been a lot of talk about reforms, but in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon countries, a much less coherent reform programme has been carried out and less dramatic effects have been reported. In contrast, Norway has been portrayed as a much more reluctant reformer where NPM seems to be more of a marginal phenomenon with less impact.

The fact that we find similar reform attempts in Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden—four countries on opposite sides of the globe—indicates that NPM is a global trend. While most studies of this trend cover only the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (and many studies are based on OECD data), similar reform attempts have been reported from a number of other countries around the world (OECD 1999a; World development report 1997). Several countries have embarked on

the same reform path, yet their approach to reform and the results of these reforms differ. Why have they embarked on the same reform path and why do approaches and results differ?

The evolution of NPM into a more or less global trend, where similar reforms have been pursued, more or less simultaneously, in a number of countries, provides students of such reforms with convenient opportunities for making comparisons. Most explanations offered in the literature, however, say little about whether we should expect reforms that are part of such a global trend to be different and to yield different results to reforms that are more unique to single countries. One may ask whether it makes a difference if national reforms are part of a global trend, how such a trend develops and how national reforms and global trends are related.

Even though accounts of NPM normally portray the trend as one with extensive international and transnational elements, explanations for the extent, shape and effects of reforming are generally sought on the national level. If it is true, as I am claiming here, that NPM is a trend that is for the most part internationally and transnationally formed, then more elaborate explanations are called for, explanations that go beyond the national level when analysing differences and similarities. In addition to similarities and differences in national context, we may also find reasons for similarities and differences between reforms as we follow the spread of NPM and find out how and why reform ideas have been circulated and mediated between countries. In this chapter I outline three types of global trend and show how each of them offers a layer of additional explanations for the similarities and differences between NPM reforms.

Three types of global trend

How do we identify a trend? Usually when we observe similar phenomena appearing in different settings. Any given trend may, however, have developed in a number of different ways. Here I will distinguish between three types of trends, using as a criterion the way in which national reforms are related both to each other and to the evolving global trend.

The first type of trend is nationally based and results when a number of countries pursue similar reforms at the same time but independently of each other. The reason why countries reform in similar ways may be that they face similar problems and have developed similar ways of solving them. The way in which individual reforms have been designed and developed and the national contexts of these reforms may explain similarities, but also differences between them. In a world with extensive contacts between countries, such trends are actually quite unlikely. It seems more reasonable to assume that trends will come about as a result of some kind of interaction among reformers.

The second type of trend is internationally formed. Reformers do not act only in an isolated national context but learn from each other, imitate each other, react to each other and present their reforms to each other. The trend is a consequence of a set of ideas travelling around the world (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). In order to understand how such a trend emerges and what

explains the extent, shape and effects of reforming, one needs to look closer at how and why countries have followed each other and what impact this has had on the design and development of reforms in different settings. In other words, relations between reformers in different countries may account for what shape the trend takes. Thus, we may explain similarities and differences between countries by looking at how countries imitate and learn from each other and how ideas and experiences are transformed as they move from one country to the next.

The third type of trend is transnationally formed. In addition to reformers, there are a number of observers and mediators of reform ideas and experiences, such as researchers, international organisations, consultants and publications. They produce and provide information and comparisons, report on and propose initiatives for change and act as arenas for the exchange of experience, ideas and ideals. They assess reforms and publish guidelines for how to reform. These mediators do not only report about and transport ideas and experiences between reformers. They turn their attention to certain reforms and they produce information about some reforms, but not others and when doing this they also direct others' attention to certain reforms which may then be seen as prototypes which countries direct their attention to and try to follow. They also frame ideas and experiences, transforming them in the process, and they teach countries how to reform (Finnemore 1996). Thus, parallel to and interwoven with national reforms, more or less global templates for reform have been produced by the many observers, assessors, researchers and, not least, international organisations tracking the reforms. The trend thus takes the form of a kind of transnational network where similarities and differences between countries partly follow from the way reforms are reflected and constructed by the many mediators of ideas—such as researchers, international organisations, consultants and the media—that are perceived to constitute a world society with a certain culture and structure (Meyer et al 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999).

When characterizing the trend as transnationally formed I want to emphasize the importance of transnational mediators and how they form templates and prototypes outside the national context. Another important feature of transnationally formed trends is that the reform ideas may enter a national state administration at a number of different levels. Circulated ideas need not only be adopted by central administrators and politicians who then initiate national reforms. This is especially true as the public service – as a result of decentralization, devolution and reforms which have strengthened the identity and autonomy of local units – in several countries has become reconstructed as a kind of polycentric networks consisting of many separate organizations (Steward and Walsch 1992; Martin 1995; Åkerstrøm Andersen 1995; Hood 1996; Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, forthcoming).

It is reasonable to assume that most global trends come into being partly through more or less independent national initiatives, partly through a process of international mimicry and partly through transnational construction and circulation of prototypes and templates, though it may not always be easy to distinguish these three processes empirically. In fact we may seldom see pure examples of any one of these three types of trend. Rather, a global trend is likely to combine elements of all three, albeit with varying emphases. I would like to

use this typology of global trends to show where explanations for differences and similarities between reforms may be found. The point I want to make is that while NPM is a trend which can be described as nationally, internationally and transnationally formed, most explanations found in the literature are nationally based. This disproportionate focus on national settings may miss some of the more fundamental dynamics of the reform processes. Hence my argument that additional layers of explanations should be considered. Below I will elaborate on these three types of global trend and on the explanations they offer for differences and similarities between NPM reforms. Because my claim here is that national explanations dominate the literature, while international and transnational aspects of the NPM-trend should be more attended to, in the overview below I will just give a brief overview of some nationally based explanations, while I spend somewhat more space to elaborate on internationally and transnationally based explanations to differences and similarities between NPM reforms.

Nationally formed public management reforms.

Most reports on NPM reform processes either concern one country or are structured as comparisons between countries. From such studies we learn how reforms have been initiated in a national context and how this context may explain the outcome of the reforms.

Extensive overviews of public management reforms are published regularly by the OECD's Public Management Committee (PUMA). Here similarities in reform attempts have mostly been attributed to similarities in the problems that countries face (OECD 1993, 1995, 1999a). As countries face similar problems, it is argued, they have reformed, and ought to reform, along similar lines. The differing results, on the other hand, are attributed to differences in the design, focus and degree of coherence of the reforms. New Zealand has repeatedly been described as a country where consistent and extensive reforms were initiated, while the reforms pursued elsewhere were less coherent and less revolutionary. New Zealand is also repeatedly cited as the country that shows the most dramatic changes in its public management.

Several studies have gone beyond comparisons between reform initiatives and have developed more contextual explanations for similarities and differences between NPM reforms in different countries. Differing constitutional arrangements (Olsen and Peters 1996), administrative systems (Hood 1995; Christensen and Laegreid 1999), reform traditions (Pallott 1998) and cultures (Christensen and Laegreid 1999) account for differences in governments' motives for launching reform, what opportunities are available to them and what changes such reforms lead to. The dynamics connected with changing political majorities are further explanations for why some countries have reformed more dramatically than others and why their approaches have been different (Mascarenas 1990). Other studies have suggested that the economic situation and varying types of economic control explain why some countries have reformed more than others and why reforms have led to more dramatic effects in some countries (Olson et al 1998).

In this section I have given a brief summary of some explanations found in the literature have shown that the design as well as the results of NPM reforms are shaped by differing national context. National explanations, which are those most commonly found in the literature, portray reforms as nationally constructed and nationally implemented. Similarities and differences are explained by national particularities. Such explanations have contributed extensively to the understanding of these reforms, and extensive studies of reforms in different contexts have led to conclusions that what is appropriate to do in one context may not be possible or suitable in another context (World development report 1997). Such nationally based explanations may, however, seem too limited when considering how NPM has evolved into a trend. Interaction between the reform initiatives in different countries is not taken into account in such explanatory models. To these nationally focused explanations may be added other types of analyses that more explicitly take into account that NPM is an internationally and transnationally formed trend.

Internationally formed public management reforms

Processes of imitation have driven several NPM reforms (Olson et al 1998; Sahlin-Andersson 1996; Røvik 1996, 1998) and organisational and administrative changes more generally (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 1991; Sevón 1996; Westney, 1987). Sometimes such processes of imitation are evident when reformers make open reference to each other. Often, however, we find few direct references but many indirect and less visible links between reformers. Countries learn from each other, they imitate each other and, with reference to similar problems, they launch similar reforms. However, in the transfer of ideas from one country to another, these same ideas are transformed. Thus, even when reforms follow from processes of imitation, the content, shape and scope of such reforms differ.

When focusing on how ideas travel between countries rather than on what happens to them once they have been adopted, three types of explanation may be relevant. First, by establishing who imitates whom and why, we can explain why some countries have reformed more than others and why reforms differ in shape, scope and focus. Second, some aspects of reform seem more likely to be imitated than others and some “types of reform” seem more likely to be imitated than others. If one examines the process of imitation, it becomes clear how and why some aspects of reform are imitated while others are not. Third, ideas and experiences are formed and transformed as they are transferred. Even though certain national experiences and practices are frequently referred to in writings and talks about NPM, it is not the practices and experiences as such that diffuse but their representation and presentation. Thus, in order to explain similarities and differences between reforms that result from the process of imitation, we need to learn how the presentation and representation of reform ideas and experiences are shaped and transformed as they circulate.

Who imitates whom?

Uncertainty has been shown to drive imitation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983); more specifically, when organisations are uncertain about their own experiences, or when their earlier development and activities are questioned, they turn to others for experiences and models to imitate (Sahlin-Andersson 1996; Sevón 1996). The public sector was questioned in many Western countries during the 1980s, especially in those facing fiscal problems, and these countries turned to other countries and other societal sectors for experiences and models to imitate.

NPM is most elaborated in Anglo-Saxon countries. Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia, and to some extent USA, were early reformers who were later imitated (Laughlin and Pallot 1998). Imitation took place earlier and was most common among countries with similar cultures and languages. These early reformers are also the countries where reforms have been most extensive and thorough, partly, of course, because the reforms have been in progress for a longer period of time. Other countries, such as Sweden, followed, and later, countries such as Norway, Switzerland, Germany and France pursued similar, but less thorough reforms (Laughlin and Pallot 1998, Lüder 1998, Musselin 1997).

The diffusion of reforms seems to follow a similar pattern to that of other processes of imitation. Actors within a field tend to imitate the more prestigious and well-known actors, but also those they identify with (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 1991; Sevón 1996). Developments and reforms in Anglo-Saxon countries – I am thinking primarily of the UK and US - receive a lot of attention around the world, and thus reforms carried out in these countries can be expected to be more likely imitated than reforms initiated in less “well-known” countries. In addition, countries that are viewed as similar and whose administrations are structured in similar ways may be more ready to imitate each other than countries where this is not the case. Furthermore, we can expect that as one country has imitated another country earlier, it may continue to imitate the same country. Thus habit as well as perceived similarities play a role in the process of imitation.

Keeping all these explanations in mind it is not surprising that the NPM-trend first spread among the Anglo-Saxon countries, then followed countries who identified themselves with and were closely identified by others as in one way or another similar to these early reformers. Similarities between Sweden, New Zealand and Australia have been pointed out earlier and Sweden has, in terms of language and culture if not in terms of administrative structure, often kept close contacts with Anglo-Saxon countries. In contrast countries such as Germany and France are far more distant – in identity terms (for a discussion on this see Olson et al 1998). Furthermore, reforms initiated in one part of Scandinavia are often taken up by other Scandinavian countries. Scandinavian countries have been shown to imitate each other in many areas, a repeated imitation which may be explained by their similarities in languages, common history, similarities in how public sector is structured but also following from earlier imitation and ongoing collaborations, and the formal structures for

collaboration among these countries which have been formed over the years (cf. for example Læg Reid and Pedersen 1994; Jacobsson and Sundström 1999).

Which types and aspects of reforms are imitated?

Even when countries imitate each other, they do not imitate everything. Some reforms seem to be more readily imitated than others, and some aspects of reform seem to be imitated more than others. Change –and movement – receives more attention than no change (Bateson 1979; Sevón 1996). Hence, reforms which are described as bringing with them dramatic changes can be expected to be more likely to be imitated than less dramatic or incremental changes or non-changes. Moreover, models that are “packaged” so that they can “be transported” are more easily imitated (Strang and Meyer 1993; Røvik 1998, forthcoming). More precisely, it has been shown that ideas which are associated with the dominant and celebrated values of modern society, such as science, rationality and efficiency, diffuse better than those imbued with other values (Meyer 1996; Røvik 1998, forthcoming). Furthermore, ideas that are associated with or seem to originate from settings that have displayed some type of success spread more easily than those that are associated with less successful models (Sevón 1996; Røvik 1998, forthcoming). The much referred to and imitated New Zealand reforms have been described and argued for in theoretical terms and in terms of dramatic changes. The theoretical framing has meant that the reforms have appeared as much more consistent – and more rational – than for example Australian and Swedish reforms which have appeared more incremental (Olson et al 1998; OECD 1999a).

Reforms, or indeed models in general, are not, as DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p.29) phrased it, “imported whole cloth”. Rather, certain aspects of a model or reform may be imitated while other parts are ignored. In her study of the modernisation of Japanese society during the Meiji period, Westney (1987) showed that unique Japanese forms of public service and public administration were built through the imitation of well-known Western societal institutions. When the Western models were imitated, some aspects of them were left out and others were added. This was partly a result of a conscious decision to imitate only certain aspects of an administrative system that had evolved elsewhere, partly because some practices and models may not have been fully understood or were impossible to imitate, and partly because imitated models were mixed with other models and national traditions. Similarly, when following the travels of reforms from New Zealand to other OECD countries, some aspects of the reforms have been imitated and others not. Management principles and new ways of measuring were among those aspects of the reforms that have been subject to widespread imitation, while the more fundamental restructuring of the public sector and the economy in general did not seem to be imitated to the same extent (OECD 1995). A simple way to describe this is to say that things that are easiest to imitate are also those that tend to be most imitated.

Reforms are usually argued for in terms of positive consequences (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). Some common arguments behind the NPM reforms were that they would result in more efficient public operations, increase the transparency of the administration and make managers accountable—and more accountabil-

ity would lead to improved service, increased attention to clients' wishes and needs, and better performance (Boston et al 1996). In line with such arguments one might have expected that late reformers would follow in the steps of early reformers, as the consequences of the early reforms became evident. However, even though writings about the reforms are widespread and extensive, it is not easy to find systematic reports on the effects of these reforms. What is more, NPM reforms were imitated and spread at such a rapid rate that it was in any case too early to assess their consequences when the reform attempts were imitated. Thus, we cannot conclude that it was the consequences of the early reforms that led to their imitation. Instead, it was the plans and initiatives that were imitated, for plans circulate more easily than effects and they are often dramatic, announce change and are formed in such a way that they are possible and attractive to imitate.

What was imitated then was not the whole package of NPM, but certain aspects and parts thereof. The term NPM had not even been heard of when some of the reforms and procedures began to be imitated in the 1980s. The term NPM was first used by Christopher Hood in 1990, when he compared changes in the style of public administration in the OECD-countries during the 1980s. Hood (1990) observed a number of reforms that had been carried out and found similarities. This motivated him to place these reforms under the same heading, but he also noticed that countries had reformed differently. Thus, while there were enough similarities to warrant a common heading, as has been emphasised time and again, NPM is not a coherent and consistent reform model. Instead, NPM has been described as a group of ideas (Hood 1991), variations on a theme (Hood 1995) or a cluster of ideas (Olsen and Peters 1996; Power 1997).

Originally NPM was not the name of package of reforms to be implemented but was retrospectively used as a label to describe reforms that had already taken place, and the application of this label did not stop the reforms developing further. This is even true for the New Zealand reforms, often described as the most coherent set of reforms and sometimes presented under the rubric "The New Zealand model" (Boston et al 1996). Originally the reforms in New Zealand were designed, in part, as a model for dramatic change, inspired by public choice theory, agency theory and transaction-cost economics (Boston et al 1996). A closer look at the reform process, however, reveals that the reforms were not actually designed all at once as a coherent package. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, one reform led to another (Boston et al 1996; Pallot 1998). Thus, the model was constructed as the reforms proceeded.

When grouping a set of reforms and procedures under the heading of NPM, several writers have emphasised the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of these reforms and the ways of governing advocated. The reforms are said to mark a paradigmatic shift (Aucoin 1990). What is common to all NPM reforms is that their ideas have been borrowed from the conceptual framework of private sector administrative practice (Power 1997) and the reforms have been described as a marriage between two different streams of ideas: managerialism and agency theory (Hood 1991). These characterisations point to the programme of the reforms, as Power (1997) formulated it.

When characterising NPM in terms of its programmes, Power built on a useful distinction, taken from Rose and Miller (1992), between, on the one hand, programmatic or normative elements of a certain practice and, on the other hand, its technological or operational elements (similar distinctions have been used, for example, by Blomgren 1999 and Bäckström 1999). While the programmatic element refers to the ideas, aims and objectives of a certain practice, the technological element refers to the concrete tasks or routines of which this practice consists.

While the programmatic character of NPM has often been stressed in the academic literature, it may not always be as clear in practice. Even though recent reforms in the public sector, retrospectively seem to have marked something of a paradigmatic shift, with a changed identity for the public sector, this may not always have been the reformers' intention (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, forthcoming). While NPM's programme has been extensively discussed and analysed in academic writings, when the reforms were initiated in practice, the programme behind these techniques was not always visible or explicit, but the technical elements, such as the introduction of new accounting systems, documentation instruments, pricing systems or hiring and payment procedures, were discussed and introduced in terms of their technical elements.

Studies of organisational reforms have suggested that the link between the programmatic and technical elements of a given practice may be loose and may change over time. Bäckström (1999) showed that organisational arrangements which were introduced in the 1970s to bring more democracy into the workplace (his studies concerned organizational development projects in the private sector industry) were reintroduced in the 1990s, but this time framed in terms of efficiency and competition. Bäckström concluded that not only were techniques and their accompanying ideology loosely coupled, but the ideology seemed to change more easily over time than the techniques.

Some techniques, however, seem clearly connected to a certain program, even when such a program is not explicitly announced as the reform is being launched. Reformers may have been attracted by a certain technique or tool, discovering only later that this technique presupposed certain programmatic ideas. Vrangbæk (1999) analysed just such a reform process in the Danish healthcare system, calling it a "Trojan horse." The reform, a system of customer choice, was conceived and argued for in technical terms, but when it was implemented it changed the logic of the whole operation. New comparisons, frames of reference, assumptions and overall objectives were invoked by the newly introduced techniques (see also Blomgren 1999).

Accounting arrangements are at the centre of the NPM ways of governing, and the introduction of more business like forms of accounting have been pointed out as some of the more prevalent and central NPM reforms (Olson et al 1998). Sweden, as well as New Zealand and Australia, now have more or less complete systems of accrual accounting on all levels of government. When tracing the introduction of accrual accounting in the Swedish public sector, however, Olson and Sahlin-Andersson (1998) showed that the first elements of more business like forms of accounting were introduced in Swedish local governments already in the 1920's. Since then the system has gradually been

extended, elaborated and added to so that in the late 1990's accrual accounting had been diffused across levels and sectors in Swedish society; where similar standard charts of accounts are used in private and public organizations alike. When tracing this development it becomes clear that in different periods different objectives have lied behind the request for an elaborated accounting; at different phases in this development, the techniques have been attached to differing programmes or normative elements. Moreover, since the forming of accrual accounting in the Swedish public sector evolved over such a long period of time, in a highly incremental process, these reforms do not seem as readily to attract others' interest and to be imitated to the extent as the more revolutionary, concentrated and more distinctively theoretically programmed New Zealand accounting reforms.

The examples above suggest that programmes do not always drive techniques—sometimes it can be the other way round, whereby techniques are developed or imported and open the way for programmatic changes. This, of course, is not unique to the development and circulation of NPM. A similar observation has been made about scientific developments. While scientific advances are often described as more or less paradigmatic shifts marked by great discoveries and new theories, in fact they are not necessarily theoretically driven. Rather, the parallel processes of experimentation, the development of new tools and techniques and general theoretical developments combine in a more ecological fashion to produce new scientific insights (Fujimura 1996; Galison 1997).

The distinction between programme and technique suggests that when studying a global trend we need to look closer at what is being spread, how it is being spread and by whom. When tracing how NPM has evolved into a global trend we will discover that not only have different but related reforms been pursued in various places, but also that when the NPM label, ideas and tools are circulated they may be combined differently at different stages of the process and in different places.

How are ideas transformed when they are transferred?

Reformers may learn about reforms to imitate through written reports, on short visits during which they are given talks about a country's experience with reforms, or more indirectly when consultants or researchers tell them about change initiatives elsewhere. Thus, what is spreading is not practice as such, but accounts of this practice. Models, ideas and experiences are presented and represented in various ways as they are circulated, most commonly in the form of written presentations or in oral communication. In previous studies I pointed to the forming and transforming of such presentations as a vital aspect of the circulation of ideas and described it as a kind of editing process (Sahlin-Andersson 1996, forthcoming). The distance between the supposed source of the model and the imitating actor provides scope for translating, filling in or editing the model in various ways. The way in which such editing is done may help to explain why countries following the same reform path do so in such different ways.

Written texts are often subjected to editing, not only once but repeatedly, and texts are edited differently depending on the context in which the editing is done and the use that the writer sees for the text. Through the process of editing, an idea may be formulated more clearly and made more explicit, but reformulation may also change not only the form of the text but also its focus, content and meaning. So if we view the circulation of ideas as a process of editing, we can see how and why ideas are transformed when they are transferred from one place to another.

If we trace the path of a circulated model we see that such editing is circumscribed by the context in which it is done and that the process exhibits a certain pattern. Usually both written and more implicit rules or conventions guide such editing. I have termed these “editing rules” in order to imply that they are derived from the context in which the editing takes place, that they restrict the process of representing and retelling and that they are only to a limited extent explicit and should be understood as “rules which have been followed”. In following the paths of concepts and models I have discerned three sets of editing rules: they concern context, logic and formulation.

As an experience is accounted for and transferred from one setting to another, overly unique and country-specific aspects of the reforms are discarded. As practices are accounted for and turned into models these practices are disembedded from the country-specific and time-specific contexts. They are distanced and disconnected from time and space and rendered generalisable (Giddens 1990; Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). In this way the models are made available for others to imitate or adopt (Greenwood et al 1998; Røvik 1998).

Stripping models of their national context takes place in several steps. It may start when countries report on their reforms. They may want to shape their presentation in a way that will make their reforms interesting to others, disregarding those aspects of the reforms that seem too unique and too time- or country-specific and emphasising those that seem to be general and generalisable. Further editing is then done by those who mediate ideas, experiences and models, and again when the model is adopted in a new setting.

The NPM trend can be said to have started with, or have a background in, the reforms that were carried out in Britain during the Thatcher era. At that time such reforms were seen as highly political and ideological. Such a feature may restrict the reforms’ potential for diffusion – those who adhere to a different ideology are not likely to adopt them as models. Over the years, however, the ideological element of the reforms has been de-emphasised and they are instead described and argued for in terms of expertise. One type of NPM reform has been concerned with what has often been described as deregulation. In a number of publications on such reforms issued by the OECD’s public management committee (see below for more on this) the expression “right regulation”, rather than deregulation, is used. This change of terms was deliberate in an attempt to keep ideology out of the discussion and instead to argue for the reforms in terms of expertise (Lerdell and Sahlin-Andersson 1997). There are of course different opinions, expressed in the literature, about the extent to which NPM presupposes a specific ideological program. The example given above

suggests, however, that repeated efforts have been made by OECD and others to de-emphasise the ideological element in their accounts of the reforms.

As NPM has become a trend, its ideas have come to be regarded as universal and as applicable everywhere, regardless of the special circumstances of different countries. Procedures have been generalised in the sense that they state how organisations in general should be managed, controlled and structured. They have been made apolitical in the sense that they are defended on the basis of expertise rather than ideology and presented as free from ideological considerations (Hood and Jackson 1991; Boston et al 1996). This brings us to the second set of editing rules.

A second set of rules concerns logic. As initiatives and effects are presented the logic of the story is often reconstructed. Developments may acquire a more rationalistic flavour. Causes and effects tend to be clarified, effects are presented as resulting from identifiable activities, and processes are often described as following a problem-solving logic. Attention may be paid to a certain aspect of a development, while other aspects are omitted or erased. I noted above that plans tend to circulate more easily than effects. As these plans are circulated, however, they are often described as if were they effects—plans are interpreted as accounts of how reforms have proceeded (Sahlin-Andersson forthcoming). In the course of the editing, accidental or coincidental circumstances are removed, as are aspects of reforms and their effects which cannot be explained and accounted for in simple terms. The models that attract the interest of other countries and that are deemed to be worthy of imitation are those whose implementation seems possible in another setting. Thus, models and reforms that are imitated are those that are presented as planable, and the editing procedure may involve emphasising or ascribing intentions, actors, procedures and effects to an observed and presented development. As procedures are imitated they are often described as models. As experiences in one place are edited into a model they tend to be rationalised and scientised (c.f. Strang and Meyer 1993).

Even though the NPM-reforms in all countries have evolved over time, where one reform has led to another, when these reforms have been told about and accounted for they have been described in much more consistent and coherent terms, as pre-packaged, and with clear intentions. Another example of how national procedures are edited into transportable models is found when one follows the flow of the idea of independent agencies. As part of its recent reforms of the public sector, Britain planned to reform its ministries and agencies. Inspired by principal-agent theories, a model was proposed that would make agencies quite independent of ministries. The idea was that, if politics and public service could be more clearly separated, the executive capability of the agencies would increase. When designing this reform the British went to study Sweden, where a system of independent agencies has been in place since the 17th century. So while the restructuring of British agencies was clearly framed in NPM terms, reference was made to Sweden as an example that had been followed. This thus came to be known as a “Swedish model”, with the result that Sweden then started to regard its own, centuries-old system of independent agencies in NPM terms! This is not only an example of how followers make leaders (Edelman 1988) but also of how pointless it is to look for the

origin of an imitation process – for values and meanings are generated in the process of diffusion (cf. Bourdieu 1977).

A third set of editing rules concerns formulation. As reform initiatives and their effects are presented and represented, they acquire labels and may also be dramatised as they are told in a certain kind of language. These accounts acquire certain formats, or stated differently, they are formed into narratives of certain genres (Czarniawska 1997). Concepts, categories, prototypical examples, counter-examples, references, and ideological frameworks are used to structure, narrate and make sense of a certain procedure or to draw others' attention to a certain development. In the editing process various techniques may be packaged under a common heading, or they may be repackaged under a different heading than they had before. The programme behind certain techniques can be made more or less visible, and in some cases, as described above, techniques can even be ascribed a different programme (Blomgren 1999; Bäckström 1999; Vrangbæk 1999; Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, forthcoming).

The definition of NPM is general rather than specific. What is more, it is sometimes argued for and defined not as a new form of governing, but rather in terms of what it is not –i.e., the old public administration and bureaucracy. This feature is most clearly captured by the word “new”, which signals that it is a way of managing that breaks with previous traditions. Even though parts of what is today included in NPM is not particularly new – in relation to previous ways to administer the public services or in relation to theories and principles for management that have been taught in business schools and practised in business (Jacobsson and Sahlin-Andersson 1995; Furusten and Lerdell 1998) – when circulating these models under the heading of NPM, this label clearly signals a break with the past and the introduction of something new. The emphasis of the “new” attracts attention, and makes the reforms interesting for those who want to break with previous traditions. As the public sector was being questioned in many western countries in the late 80's, reforms that so clearly signalled a break with the past and the introduction of something new attracted a lot of interest.

In what way, then, does the editing follow a rule like pattern? As reforms and experiences are accounted for and narrated, they need to be framed and presented in familiar and commonly accepted terms in order for them to make sense to the reader or listener. Thus, national experiences and reforms tend to be presented to others in terms of existing templates, examples, categories, scientific concepts, theoretical frameworks and widespread classifications that are familiar. These concepts, references and frameworks form the infrastructure of editing and they restrict and direct how the accounts are given. In such a way widespread and well-known classifications may be used to sort out what is being told as accounts are delivered and transferred (c.f. Bowker and Star 1999).

Concepts, ideologies, examples and interests are not the same everywhere. Examples and ideologies that dominate one setting, and may be taken for granted in this setting, may be unknown or unpopular in another setting. The infrastructure, and thus the editing rules, differ between situations and contexts. For example, in settings dominated by certain ideologies or interests, accounts may be framed and formed by certain normative and ontological

assumptions. This specific infrastructure determines the editing of ideas and experiences. Each context in which the editing of models and experiences takes place may be regarded as an editing infrastructure. We may thus describe the process as one of recontextualising experiences and models. When using the term editing I want to emphasise that this recontextualization may change the formulation as well as the meaning and content of experiences and models. As ideas change over time, we may expect later reforms to differ from earlier reforms.

In this section I have suggested that explanations for differences in the shape and scope of reforms among countries that have embarked on the reform path may be found not only by comparing reforming countries with each other but also by following how NPM ideas flow and how they are constructed and transformed as they flow. The analysis shows the importance of previous relations, attention structures, processes of imitation and editing and also timing. As ideas change over time, we may expect later reforms to differ from earlier reforms.

Transnationally formed public management reforms

Despite the comparative lack of knowledge regarding the effects of the NPM reforms, a number of guidelines have been circulated—via the media, consultants, researchers and, not least, international organisations—on how to reform, and models of best practice have been disseminated. Australia, and to an even greater extent New Zealand, have often been pointed to as examples for others to follow or to learn from. As a result, these countries have attracted tremendous attention from various international bodies as well as from representatives of other countries. For example, in the 1990's Swedish media have written quite extensively about New Zealand models, and also in papers issued within the public administration New Zealand was often mentioned as a model to follow, as a comparison with which Swedish reforms and experiences were compared, and, less often, accounted for as a model that Sweden should not follow (for example Henriksson and Svensson 1998).

When describing the circulation of reform ideas and experiences in terms of editing processes, above I pointed to the importance of the observers and mediators of such ideas and experiences. A number of observers of reforms - such as researchers, consultants, media and international organizations - mediate information about these reforms, and more generally about ways of governing and managing, and as they mediate such information they edit it in ways described in the previous section. They focus on certain examples and direct others' attention to them. They describe initiatives and ideas and as they describe them they frame their observations in certain ways, they provide comparisons and analyse what they see. Sometimes they assess and evaluate national reforms; they draw more normative conclusions from what they observe, and thus set standards for what is good, bad, necessary or unimportant. This indicates that global reform trends to a large extent are constructed and pursued transnationally, by these mediators and editors of ideas and experiences. Many such mediators and editors are not representing

any specific country, but they cut across and transcend national boundaries. In such a way global trends are transnationally constructed.

In this section I will focus on one important mediator and editor of NPM ideas – OECD’s public management committee (PUMA) – and I will use this international organisation as an example to show three aspects of the transnational construction of NPM. First, I will exemplify how international organisations edit and circulate ideas. Second, I will discuss how countries have reacted to and adopted such circulated accounts and assessments. And third, I will suggest why international organisations take on the role of editors and circulators.

Before turning to these issues, I will briefly present the organisation – PUMA – on which this section mainly focuses. PUMA was formed in 1990 as an OECD committee. PUMA stands both for the Public Management Service and the Public Management Committee. The committee directs the work of PUMA and consists of representatives of the OECD member countries. The work programme is carried out by the Public Management Service in collaboration with appointed experts. The committee meets twice a year at the OECD, where decisions are taken on PUMA’s focus of activity and programme. At its meetings the committee also discusses subjects and reports prepared by the secretariat and various working groups. Participants share their experience and information about what is happening in their own national administrations.

Aside from committee meetings, PUMA organises groups of national representatives in a number of areas, and each group arranges working meetings, symposia, seminars, etc. These are administered by the secretariat, which also prepares and follows up activities by producing documentation and publishing reports, as well as in other ways. PUMA is thus an important mediator and editor of NPM ideas.

International organisations as producers of templates and prototypes

In previous studies the OECD has been described as an information system (Sjöstedt 1973), a harmonising agent (Harrison and Mungal 1990), an active disseminator of ideas and ideals (Egeberg 1978; Olsen and Peters 1996), and a driving force and creator of national ideas and ideals (Finnemore 1992; Mörth 1996). International organisations such as the OECD play an important role in directing attention to specific countries, specific phenomena and specific aspects of developments; they codify, compare and categorise reforms and changes. In other words, they are important editors of reform ideas and experiences (Sahlin-Andersson 1996, forthcoming). More specifically, OECD’s Public Management Committee – PUMA – has been identified as an important mediator, proselytiser and editor of NPM ideas.

Such editing was done as PUMA collected, summarised, compared and assessed information about reforms in the member countries. PUMA regularly perform surveys of Public Management Developments. While the background and context of public management reforms differ between countries and between reforms in individual countries (Hood 1995), they are put into a common framework as they are collected and presented in publications issued by PUMA. Presentations are usually organized in the same way for all countries

so as to permit comparison. Promising attempts at reform are described in aspects that seem relevant for implementation. Often the reports would include a number of key indicators that summarize the reforms.

In a report entitled "Governance in transition: Public management reforms in the OECD countries" (1995) PUMA issued an extensive overview of reforms in their member countries. The entire report emphasized reforms. Here specific countries were pointed out as examples to follow. In addition, direct references to the reform attempts in specific countries were made in the form of excerpts from statements by representatives of the member countries on certain reforms. Repeatedly, it was emphasized that even though public management reforms have been inspired by "best practice" in the private sector, "in the public sector they are, in many respects, journeys into unknown territory (p.27)". It was also said that "there is no single model of reform; there are no off-the-shelf solutions (p. 25)". Thus, it was important continually to follow up and evaluate what had been accomplished. The final and summarizing chapters, however, downplayed the differences and uncertainty; they presented a reform agenda which embodied the principal features of the national reforms. The agenda consisted of recommendations and normative pronouncements on how government should be reformed. Differences among countries were said to reflect differences in emphasis and rate of national reform, but the direction and the main content of the reforms were claimed to be similar from country to country and also to be the right (and only) way to go. Reforms and experiences were generalised and assembled as a reform agenda or policy package, and a common logic and common explanations were ascribed to the reforms. The reforms were described and justified as responses to a common set of problems facing all OECD countries, and they were labelled as a coherent and consistent package.

This packaging - which was done not only by PUMA but also by researchers, consultants, the media and others in the many publications and reports that have been written about these reforms - took place after some of the more significant reforms referred to had already been initiated. The Anglo-Saxon countries had been reforming for a decade and some aspects of what was now included in the presented reform package were arrangements and changes of much older origin, but they were now presented as a more or less coherent package. This package was then used as a basis for comparing and assessing countries.

The term packaging may give the impression that this international organisation's treatment of the ideas and experiences does not affect the ideas and experiences themselves, they just bundle them together in certain ways. But, as I have described above, what is circulated are presentations, not the ideas themselves. Consequently, when packaging, it is not only the form of these ideas that changes but the content as well. This further suggests that it may not be easy to distinguish between form and content; changes in form may well imply changes in content (Czarniawska 1997).

PUMA provided normative models or examples—prototypes—for how to improve and reform the public sector. These prototypes were presented as a series of recommendations, together with instructions on how to implement

them, and they sometimes referred to how a reform or reform package had been carried out in practice in a particular country. In the PUMA publications New Zealand has repeatedly been pointed out as an example to follow – a prototype for successful reforms. In addition, PUMA formed and used templates: sets of concepts and criteria that were used to present, compare and assess reforms. In relation to the coherent and consistent reform template with which PUMA compares reforming countries, Sweden and earlier, to a more limited extent, Australia, were shown to be – and partly criticized for being – much more incremental reformers.

While some reports point to specific examples, others give a more general overview and summary of the reforms in the OECD countries. In the report “Synthesis of reform experiences in nice OECD countries” (OECD 1999a) a more generalized picture of reforms is given. No specific countries are mentioned, instead expressions such as “some countries”, “a few countries” and “most countries” are used. Here, what is produced, is a scheme or a template with which single countries may be compared and assessed. When packaging reforms, and issuing prototypes and templates, the international organization edits national stories of reforms according the editing rules concerning context, logic and formulation that I described above. As shown below, countries seem likely to follow, or at least respond, to the issued prototypes and templates.

Reformers as followers of templates and prototypes

PUMA does not issue binding rules and has no authority to do so. Still, PUMA, and many other international organisations, have had a major impact on how certain areas of activity have been defined and organised in national states. Finnemore (1992, 1996) has analysed a number of such processes. One of her studies concerned national research policies. Between 1955 and 1985 a large number of countries developed a national research policy and set up central bodies in charge of it. Finnemore differentiated between demand- and supply-based explanations for this trend. By demand-based she meant that special government units were created in response to a demand within the country. However, she found few examples of demand-based national research policies. Instead, countries were “taught” by international bodies — such as the OECD and UNESCO — that all modern countries urgently and unquestionably needed to have a national research policy under the supervision of a central unit. This is one example of international organisations as designers and disseminators of prototypes for countries to follow, and of templates with which countries can be compared and assessed. International organisations may provide countries with solutions and general recommendations as well as with meanings or programmes to be ascribed to such policies, and they direct countries’ attention to certain other countries identified as originals, prototypes or successful examples.

A number of statements in one recent publication from the OECD, where reform experiences from nine OECD countries were synthesized, supports the conclusion that reforming countries not only learn from each other but also follow prototypes that are issued transnationally (OECD 1999a) and present and view their reforms in terms laid down by transnationally formed templates.

This report described PUMA and other international organisations as having inspired and pushed countries to reform.

Even where a country lacked economic imperatives to reform, and had the luxury of not doing so, reputation-conscious governments, sensitive to unfavorable comparisons with others, initiated albeit moderate change. Alternatively, reform-minded governments or individual ministers championing reform were able to use rankings to raise awareness and build a critical mass to support reform agendas. (OECD 1999a: 4-5)

In some countries, the influence of the international bodies such as the OECD and especially thinking on “New public management” might have been stronger than the effects of administrative traditions and culture. (OECD 1999a: 15)

Here the OECD is portrayed as an important circulator and shaper of models—a trend-setter (c.f. Abrahamson 1996) which “reputation-conscious” governments may follow. This is not to say that the models originated in the OECD itself. The OECD report referred to above is, like most PUMA reports, based on countries’ own accounts of their reforms. What international organisations do is collect information, compare countries and analyse developments, and they edit them into prototypes. They generalize individual examples and put them into the common template.

Again we can see that it is not easy to identify an original model for a trend that later spread, for the trend as well as the models being spread are actually formed as they pass through the transnational network. Reports both from one of the most eager reformers, New Zealand, and from one of the more reluctant reformers, Norway, show that in both cases transnationally formed templates were reflected in national reforms and these reforms were inspired by transnationally formed prototypes. In one of its country reports New Zealand stated that

The thinking of officials and key politicians was greatly influenced by intellectual developments internationally, particularly from academics and international organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD.” (OECD 1999b: 8).

Norway, the country least inclined towards reform among the four being analysed in this book, used a more distant language in its report, talking about force, competition and little involvement rather than about strong effects and influence. But it also clearly pointed to the impact of international bodies - international organisations as well as consultants - on its national reforms.

The inspiration from the “New Public Management” was maybe stronger than from administrative traditions, administrative culture and historic associations engraved in the Norwegian welfare state. (Stromsnes 1999: 7).

What is illustrated in the quotations above is the interaction between reforming countries and an international organisation. The international organisation not only gives an account of what is happening in countries in terms of reform, but also encourages countries to reform and provides arguments for reforming

further. What is displayed here is a global trend which has formed not only from interaction between states, but also from interaction between states and international organisations. A global trend is therefore formed and pursued transnationally. National reformers learn from international organizations what is appropriate to do, they may acquire certain values, norms, ideals and ideas and they may use international organisations to argue the need for reform and to motivate their own governments to take measures. International organisations, in turn, provide arguments for why further reforms are needed.

While the label “NPM” earlier was generally found in the academic literature as a way of making sense of and finding more general patterns in the extensive process of reforming in OECD countries, its use has since become more widespread and the term has been adopted by observers and by reformers themselves. Indeed, NPM has become the most widely used label for the cluster of reforms that have been pursued by OECD countries and others during the last few decades, and there are signs that the label itself motivates actors to reform or at least it is used to argue for the need to reform further. Thus, as NPM is described and perceived as a package, it provides a strong argument for countries to add one set of reforms to another – in order to complete the “package” - once they have embarked on the reform path.

In March 2000, the most recent plans for reforming the Swedish national budget were presented by one of the advocates of this particular reform for a group of scholars and civil servants. In his presentation this reform advocate argued that this reform was a typical NPM reform and a natural continuation of earlier NPM reforms which had been launched in the Swedish state administration during the 1980s and 1990s. The planned budget reform was described as a way to “complete the reform path embarked on” and to “fill the reform package”. As the NPM reform package has been circulated and become more widely spread, there seems to be a tendency to view countries or organizations that have adopted parts but not all of the “package” as less coherent (OECD 1999a) and “incomplete” (c.f. Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, forthcoming). Thus, describing NPM reforms as a “package” may in itself be a way of driving countries further along the reform path.

PUMA not only issues policy recommendations for how to reform. It also identifies certain countries as successes and others as less successful examples (OECD 1995, 1999a). New Zealand has repeatedly been described as a success story when it comes to public sector reforms. Australia is also often regarded as a successful case, while reports on Sweden have been more critical. The relative allocation and attraction of attention is an important aspect of transnationally driven reform processes. International organisations have helped to direct the world’s attention to New Zealand and Australia, and representatives from all levels of government have travelled to these countries from the northern part of the globe to learn how to reform. In 1998, representatives from the national audit office in New Zealand told that they had groups of international visitors almost every week who wanted to learn about the reforms. Not only the most reformed and well known units receive visitors, but it seems as though a number of delegations find an interest in the country as it is written about in media and they pay attention to what is going on throughout the administration. From such visits a number of parallel processes of imitation and increased

interaction may follow. Such processes lead to convergence between countries, but it also means that attention is directed to certain countries and to certain aspects of reforms, and this may explain differences between reforming countries and account for processes of transformation.

The attention that reforms get from international organisations is not only seen as a sign of success by foreigners but is also taken as reassurance by the reformers themselves that they are on the right track. As pointed out above, relatively few comprehensive reviews and evaluations of the effects of NPM reforms have been done. The tremendous attention that New Zealand and Australia received from the rest of the world, however, signalled to these reformers as well as to their domestic and foreign audiences that they were on the right track.

So far, when describing reforms I have not specified in detail who the reformers are. When describing countries as reformers, this may give the impression that reform ideas are adopted by central administrators and politicians who then initiate national reforms. Many reforms inspired by widespread NPM, however, have been adopted and pursued by actors at rather low levels of the state hierarchy. Moreover, in some countries several different but related models have been pursued at the same time in different parts of the administration. Different kinds of modern quality-control models, for example, have been adopted in different parts of the Swedish healthcare system. One study showed that at least three different such models were used at the same time in one hospital (Erlingsdottir 1999). The actors — politicians, administrators, and professionals — adopted different models and they had learned about these models through different transnational networks.

Another example of how new reform ideas were adopted first, not at the top, but at lower levels of the administration is the introduction of new forms of accounting in the Swedish public administration (Olson and Sahlin-Andersson 1998). The accounting system in the Swedish public sector was first reformed on the local level, through local experiments but also through local governments imitating each other and through collaboration between these governments and university professors specialising in accounting. The university professors here served as mediators and editors of experiences and ideas taken both from the Swedish private sector and from other countries. It was only much later that the accounting system was reformed on the state level. These reforms were clearly inspired by transnationally spread prototypes, but they also contained elements of imitation of the practice of local and regional levels of the Swedish administration. Such processes of transnational reform may lead to great variations not only between but also within countries.

Why do international organisations circulate templates and prototypes?

In the section above I have described how PUMA played an important role both as a disseminator and as a more active constructor and circulator of templates and prototypes. What then are the dynamics that drive international organisations to engage increasingly in this process? In analysing this we need to look closer at the conditions under which these kinds of international organizations work, and how their way of organizing and working may be under-

stood. There are a number of organisations whose task, like PUMA's, it is to produce and provide information and comparisons, report and propose initiatives for change, and act as arenas for exchange of experience, ideas, and ideals. Among the many international organisations that have emerged during the last century, there are a number of this kind – organisations intended as arenas where people from different countries can share each other's ideas and experience. John Meyer has used the term "others" to capture the specific features of such international organisations and their activities (Meyer 1994, 1996) and to distinguish them from organisations that are assumed to pursue their own interests and policies, and which are held responsible for their actions.

Others, in this scheme loosely derived from George Herbert Mead, do not take active responsibility for organizational behavior and outcomes. They discuss, interpret, advise, suggest, codify, and sometimes pronounce and legislate. They develop, promulgate, and certify some ideas as proper reforms, and ignore or stigmatize other ideas... (Meyer 1996:244).

When analyzing and assessing local initiatives or when issuing recommendations, international organisations argue not in terms of their own interests but in terms of what is best for the countries in question; they formulate their advice and models in terms of expertise, not in terms of interests (Jacobsson forthcoming). However, even though international organisations may present themselves as neutral arenas of interaction, they are not any more neutral than other organisations are. International organisations not only co-ordinate and mediate interests and ideas but, like all other organisations, they influence and shape the activities that take place under their auspices (Finnemore 1996, Mörth 1996). How an organisation conducts its operations depends on its environment and on what it has to do to be considered important and worth dealing with. The latter determines the way an organisation obtains legitimacy and resources.

The number of international organisations, intergovernmental as well as non-governmental, has increased dramatically during the post-war period (Boli and Thomas 1999). With this development international organisations have become more important intermediaries of ideas and experiences and important providers of templates and prototypes for countries to follow. This increase in the number of international organisations has also meant increased competition between international organisations. National actors are not obliged to pay attention to them and participate in their activities, but these organizations have to compete for attention, legitimacy and resources. PUMA, just like other organisations, seeks to attract attention and resources in order to survive. Its legitimacy has been questioned ever since the committee was formed and thus it has to show that it is useful for the member states and it has to show some type of results. Disseminating prototypes and templates widely and maintaining relations with the reforming member countries are ways for PUMA to maintain the attention, legitimacy and resources needed to continue operations. This quest for attention and legitimacy seems to have led to three developments. First, the type of activities engaged in has continuously broadened. The 1999 statement of the chair stated:

...while the future members will no doubt continue to need what might be termed 'traditional public management support', there should be a discernable shift in PUMA's work towards broader issues of governance...

Second, PUMA has sought to broaden the geographical scope of its activities. Among the directions for the future work of the committee were (also mentioned in the same statement of the chair, 1999):

...developing capacities for more coherent and globalised policies; (and) delivering on policy commitments in a changing world...

Third, as a way to ensure continuous support, the committee seeks to become more clearly policy oriented in order to play a central role in forming and reforming NPM. A glance at the list of publications from PUMA supports this conclusion. While publications during the first part of the 1990s consisted of overviews, surveys and summaries, in the last few years it has published a number of reviews and assessments of single countries, and its reports define best practice, success criteria and the like. This shift in focus towards clearer policy recommendations and a more normative and evaluatory role, more generally as well as towards individual countries, may be the result from a development where NPM has become a well known concept and agenda. Lots of reforms are carried out and reported under this heading. The number of research projects and report and writings more general has grown enormously. And a number of international organizations – not only OECD, but also for example the World Bank, IMF and EU – are reporting on and emphasizes the importance of NPM. With this development NPM has developed into a field of expertise with a number of experts – many of them connected to international organizations. The emerged groups of experts displays many characteristics of an epistemic community (Haas 1992) and with this development a widespread agreement and understanding has emerged concerning what forms of governance are good and bad, right and wrong, appropriate and possible, which reforms to recommend, and what outcomes to expect. When being able to issue more firm recommendations and assessments PUMA may also be viewed as producing results that are useful for the members. Assessments and normative statements attract members attention, and activate their involvement in the organisation's activities. Producing norms and models for others to follow and reviewing and evaluating its members' reforms seemed to be one way for PUMA to maintain its legitimacy as an independent and neutral arena and at the same time yield the results needed to obtain resources and support from its environment. Thus, constructing NPM prototypes and templates is a way for an international organisation to compete with others for resources, legitimacy and attention.

In this section I have shown how global trends are formed transnationally, via a process of interaction between reformers and international organisations, and I have discussed in somewhat more detail the role played by PUMA in turning NPM into a global trend. The implication is that in order to explain the development and effects of NPM reforms one needs to analyse what role the international organisations play in the process: how they mediate and edit information about the reforms, how they interact with reformers and what their interests in evaluating and pursuing reform ideas are.

Conclusions

As an increasing number of countries around the world have reformed along similar lines, NPM has evolved into a global trend. Comparative studies reveal that even though the reforms display great similarities—to the extent that we can talk about a trend, or a reform path—because the reforms have been initiated differently, and because national contexts differ, the effects of the reforms have not been the same everywhere. In this paper I have argued that even though such studies may explain why certain effects follow or do not follow from the reforms, these studies do not explain why and how NPM became a global trend. What is missing is a demonstration of the transformation dynamics that this trend displays between countries and over time. I have suggested that the NPM trend has evolved nationally as well as internationally and transnationally. Analysis of how the reforms have been shaped internationally and transnationally reveals processes of convergence—we see how and why NPM evolved into a global trend. Furthermore, such analysis shows how the reforms, as well as their effects, are not only shaped nationally but also through processes of imitation and reflection between one country, parts of its administration and another. Furthermore, reforms are shaped as a product of interaction between national reformers and transnational mediators and editors of such reforms. Analysis of how NPM has evolved internationally and transnationally not only portrays convergence but also provides us with explanations for the transformation of reforms – differences that emerge over time and between countries.

To conclude, I will briefly return to the four countries. With this brief account I just want to point to a few examples of differences and similarities between the countries, in order to indicate how the national, international and transnational trend in combination shaped reforms and their effects. Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden faced quite different situations in the 1980's, which lead them to put more or less emphasis on reforms. Australia, New Zealand and Sweden all faced severe fiscal crisis, even though this came later in Sweden than in the other two countries, and the New Zealand crisis was experienced as even more severe than the ones experienced in the other countries (Olson et al 1998; OECD 1999a).

The New Zealand reforms were not only extensive, but were also framed in theoretical terms with expressed expectations for far reaching consequences. The small and comparatively centralized New Zealand, with a previous history of extensive and revolutionary reforms could reform in a coherent and revolutionary way (Pallot 1998). As the New Zealand reforms have become known throughout the world, and many countries have been inspired by them and imitated them, the New Zealand reforms have become known as a model (c.f. Boston et al 1996). The coherence and consistence has been reemphasized over and again as the reforms have been packaged into a model. The international and transnational attention paid to New Zealand led to further attention and imitation, and to further reforming.

Australia and Sweden, with more decentralized structures - and in the case of Sweden's accounting reforming, a history of more incremental changes - did not follow such coherent paths, at least not initially. Australia started to reform in a more pragmatic and incremental way. However, as Australia increasingly caught international attention and the Australian reformers were compared

with others, and as they learned about the transnationally spread NPM templates and prototypes at least some parts of Australia have reformed much more extensively and coherently, and they have based their reforms more in theoretical terms and in terms that we recognize from the widely spread template (OECD 1999a).

The Swedish reforms have been even more incremental. While certain parts and aspects of the administration were extensively reformed other aspects of NPM did not meet any enthusiasm in Sweden (see Forssell, this volume). As was the case in Scandinavia in general, there was initially widespread scepticism regarding the more market oriented aspects of NPM (Christensen and Laegreid 1999).

At this time, Norway, which in contrast to the other countries did not experience a fiscal crisis, did not see as strong needs for reform and they were sceptical of the NPM reforms more generally (Christensen and Laegreid 1999).

These are examples of how differences in the design of reforms and the nation's economic situation, administrative structure and earlier history of reforms resulted in the shape and effect of reforms, and these explanations point out how differences between reforms follow from differences in national initiatives and national contexts. When following process of imitation we could point to further explanations to differences between countries. Some aspects of the reforms have been more easily imitated than others, and the nature of reforms change as the ideas travel around the world.

We could also see that similarities among countries follow from such processes of imitation. As NPM has become increasingly known as a global trend, comparisons, assessments and evaluations have been performed by the many observers of such reforms. I have given examples of how the OECD collected information about reforms in the member countries, and how they, based on this information, have formulated a template with which countries then have been compared and assessed. Even though many close observers of the reforms find local variations, when the national reforms have been reported and accounted for they are described in terms of a widespread template. As NPM has been packaged and spread there are not many alternatives around for those who want to reform and search for ideas to be inspired by and to imitate. Even though the reforming decisions are nationally taken, with the editorial activities of transnational mediators, such as PUMA, prototypes have been formulated that have turned out to be available, attractive and appropriate to follow. Moreover, as transnational observers argue for certain prototypical ways, and they regard those who follow the templates to be on the right track it is not surprising if countries tend to follow such prototypes and templates.

While we can still easily point to a number of differences among OECD countries – in terms of economic situation, administrative structure, reform-tradition and political structure – most OECD-countries have picked up at least some aspects of NPM. Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden displayed quite dramatic differences in the late 1980's and early 1990's concerning how they talked about governing public service and how they tried to reform the public sector. Today, differences are not as dramatic, they all refer to NPM reforms

and they all talk about further reforms along the same track. As a result of the transnational processes reforming countries have been given great possibilities and incentives to converge – and to pursue similar reforms.

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