

The object of this study is to assess administrative reforms and change from the point of view of theoretical administrative models of hierarchical (traditional) administration, New Public Management (NPM), and New Public Governance (NPG) in Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia. Normative models offer a critique of legacy administrative practices; their wholesale implementation is seldom practical or successful. Reforms framed as “modernization” in these countries over the past three decades have generally followed the principles of NPM. Although policy arguments for introducing elements of NPG can be observed in the studied cases, the paper argues that NPG’s rhetorical attractiveness for resolving perceived shortcomings of other models lacks specific implementation mechanisms that would be viable within the existing institutional framework of the studied countries. Factors, such as the relatively small size of Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, and obvious benefits of EU integration, appear to have moderated reforms to a point that core institutional features have become stable, and are also similar among the three countries: the dominance of hierarchical administrative model with rigid separation of powers structure and strong courts that can adjudicate administrative decisions, with numerous NPM inspired “modernization” measures, including the introduction of various interactive public services. The paper’s findings support the idea that Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia are administrative systems that have stable core governance institutions, and national public administrations modernize various aspects of their operation by introducing elements of NPM and NPG within the executive, but not reviewing the basic setup of these institutions. From this point of view, the findings are in line with the assumptions of the normative model of Neo-Weberian State (NWS)

Keywords: administrative modernization, new public governance, neo-Weberian state, comparative public administration

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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MODERNIZATION: REGULARITIES OF NORMATIVE CONCEPT APPLICATION

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1. Introduction

Authoritative sources highlight the importance and value of comparative public administration [1]. Institutions of the political domain that define electoral democracy or separation of powers are persistent, and seldom fundamentally reformed. When they are, as e.g. in Poland or Hungary, very controversial vis-à-vis core values have been seen that drive European integration, such as rule of law [2] or competitive elections [3]. However, reforms in the administrative domain are the proverbial tool of elected politicians to deliver on their electoral promises. Stability is a value for political and legal government institutions, not the executive – here dynamism is often encouraged. Large administrative models are grounded in values outlined by Hood [4]. These values that are at the core of state’s institutional legitimacy: making its citizens safe, free, and prosperous, when faced with specific policy dilemmas are often hard to reconcile. The large models allow identifying the *modus operandi* of a given state in prioritizing one value over another. The three (later four) models in “Public management reform” of traditional administration, New Public Management (NPM), and New Public Governance (NPG) offer signposts for mapping change and/or stability of various elements of national administrative systems. These national particularities form the backdrop of what policy goals are set and how they are achieved

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or otherwise. Large-scale events, such as the global financial crisis of 2009, and the subsequent Eurozone crisis, increasingly polarized the nature of the political spectrum in many Western democracies, characterized by the strengthening of parliamentary position of radical political movements or political fractions, the process of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, the large-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, force governments to act. The nature of this action can be limited to policy responses, but also encourage administrative reforms, which have long-term impacts on social, economic, and political outcomes in the concerned states. This paper pays attention to the smaller eastern EU member states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, which have embraced all major EU integration instruments, and have not conducted major reforms in their political domain.

These circumstances make a study of the administrative domain relevant, as they can inform and help identify possibilities and limits of reform and modernization in national administrative systems.

2. Literature review and problem statement

Normative models of public administration are based on the values of democratic governance [4]. This study proposes that democratic governance implies that policy needs to prioritize between the values of economic efficiency, due administrative process, and state resilience. However, the three need to all be adhered to with only some variation between national systems. The assumption that NPM is an alternative to the traditional (administrative) model essentially disregards this presumption. An attempt to further theorize NPM as an alternative is presented in [5]. The concept of a hollow state assumes that legal institutions (regulation) can provide a frame for the delivery of public services on commercial or non-profit bases. In this model, the state becomes “hollowed out”, but the social system maintains its stability. This approach is problematic and indicative that empirically it is evident that administrative capacity is a necessary requirement to enforce the outputs of the regulatory state. The large comparative study [6] has shown that normative models traditional, NPM, NPG, and most recently NWS overlap in terms of what measures to achieve policy goals they apply, but in all cases maintain a measure of administrative capacity. This typology of normative models has become a key frame of reference of comparative administrative studies. But the formation and persistence of institutional cores of national administrations means that it is unclear which part of any national administrative systems are superficial, and contingent, and which are stable. A metagovernance [7] approach attempts to tackle this challenge, suggesting that all models are contingent as they are grounded in the ideological position of policymakers. All normative models have benefits and shortcomings, and if the national political establishment persists in implementing the toolkit of only one of the models, the shortcomings become accentuated to the point that a political alternative becomes favored by the electorate. This theory proposes that policy failure is next to inevitable. But this theory does lack focus on the persistence of certain national administrative features despite policy failure of adopting one or another model over time. The recent theorizing on NWS [8] draws attention to this problem, and proposes that a persistent state structure provides the frame for tool adoption. In this respect, it allows

distinguishing between more and less flexible systems that are more open for new administrative tools, but which all maintain persistent core administrative models. From this point of view, relating the literature on whole-of-government [9] to that on administrative models becomes possible. The whole-of-government theory attempts to theorize how the existing administrative institutions and capacity can be integrated to address persistent problems. And the systems ability to adopt tools that promote that integration may allow discerning a normative model of modernization of public administration. More recent publications [10, 11] argue precisely that. They suggest that coordination in the face of crises, and integration of coordination are nearly universal indicators of a sound administrative system.

Normative models imply that for their successful implementation, they need to be implemented wholesale, but the multitude of particular national factors make such efforts impossible. The literature we reviewed does not offer a resolution to the problem of identifying persistent and malleable elements of national administrative systems. All this allows us to assert that it is expedient to conduct on a solution to for discerning the administrative change (modernization) by taking into account which elements of national administrative systems are stable and persistent, and how they allow for the integration of efforts to achieve policy goals.

3. The aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to identify regularities in selected national administrative system modernization efforts in terms of larger normative models in public administration.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are accomplished:

- to propose an explanatory model of how a stable institutional background influences the dynamic element, i.e. the modernization of national public administrations;
- based on this model, to analyze three case studies;
- to compare the three case studies with the literature on the normative models of public administration NPM, NPG and NWS.

4. Materials and methods

The object of this study is modernization of public administration in three selected countries, which have implemented multiple administrative reforms over the past three decades. The research hypothesis was that these reforms carry inspiration from the normative models in public administration, but due to national institutional limitations, these models cannot be implemented wholesale. This study also assumes that there are certain regularities among the countries due to institutional similarities: EU integration, democratic governance and others. This study therefore allows us to identify the underlying institutional elements, which are stable and limit the extent to which administrative change can be affected.

The study applies the methods of historical overview and comparative analysis, by using the normative public administration models for reference. The overviews rely on prior case studies and comparative research literature analysis of public administrations of Lithuania, Latvia, and Slovakia. The country analyses are presented through periodization of major phases of administrative change.

The research team deliberated the well-grounded normative models of public administration, and tested them in terms of previously conducted national research in Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, as well as publicly available data to assess whether in the wake of post-communist transformation, a discernible model of public administration has formed, which could support outcome prognoses of future “modernization” attempts in the national public administration systems. The referencing against models would also better position these administrative systems within the broader international context.

5. Results of the study: NWS’s explanatory power of modernization

5.1. An explanatory model for public administration modernization in the context of institutional stabilization

The semantics of “public administration modernization” entails a unidimensional change – a reform that “keeps with the times”. It is an easy sale for a policymaker to demonstrate that something in government is wrong by comparison to something else. Then reformers claim that reform (or modernization) will rectify that flaw. Such rhetoric focuses and clarifies something that “doesn’t work” so intensely that the “how to fix it” question becomes almost obvious and implied in the demonstration. Challenging the policymaker on the “how” question risks place any such challenger in the category of defenders of *ancient regime*, which has been demonstrated to be fundamentally flawed. The story of New Public Management in Central Europe in many respects is the story of effectiveness of this rhetoric.

A key problem with theorizing the development of application of bureaucratic administration, NPM or NPG, is that reform contents are not framed by the concepts of these theories in the public sphere. Rather, the rhetoric of modernization takes precedence. Therefore, public administration appears inconsistent from a public administration scholarly point of view. No Eastern EU (EEU) member state consistently implemented the principles of one of these two concepts in a successful way [12–15]. However, many of the policies of region’s countries did imply the need for NPM reforms beginning with the early 1990s. But this was dictated by the necessity of economic reforms, focused on maintaining public finances, rather than a reflection of what values the government should engender.

With regard to the theory of public administration, the settled bureaucratic model as developed by famous public administration theoreticians has not contemporaneously developed because of the period of communism in the EEU states. Yet the new state institutions in the early 1990s had to parallelly implement open-market and foreign investor-friendly economic policies, often based on IMF’s recommendations. While implementing the above-mentioned reforms, institutions had low capacity [16]. Furthermore, the benefits of Weberian bureaucracy of creating institutional stability of the state and social control [17] were the critical tasks to governments at that time. Governance failures led some scholars to speculate that future EEU states face the fate of Latinization [18].

So, the construction of bureaucracy was simultaneously necessary and ongoing, while at the same time being criticized for not being “modern”. Yet these layered criticisms may have been misplaced, because the reasons of inefficiency of institutions were not so much due to their mode of organization, but rather because of their lack of capacity.

This resulted in what may be termed “legalism” – where governments chose to regulate various procedures to the details in order to control mismanagement, and at the same time were receptive to the criticisms that such behavior is counter to “modernization” trends. This paradox created a space where “modernizing public administration” essentially formed a constant and politically salient topic – where NPM rhetoric was universally accepted, but only partially implemented with actual reforms often grounded in the bureaucratic model. So much that the legalistic way of doing things has become institutionalized and was supported by important stakeholders [19].

It has taken more than three decades since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and two decades since the enlargement of the EU for three studied countries (Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia) in this paper. Over this time, it has become clear that the transition to democratic governance has been implemented, and that institutional structures of public administration have been stabilized and solidified.

The study results show that the theoretical model, assumed in the NWS, allows describing all three cases somewhat similarly. Three states embrace a stable institutional context, supported by the outcomes of EU integration, while the actual modernization agenda for the most part follows the NPM principles, despite increasing rhetorical calls by political leaderships to introduce governance mechanisms attributed to the NPG theoretical model (Fig. 1).

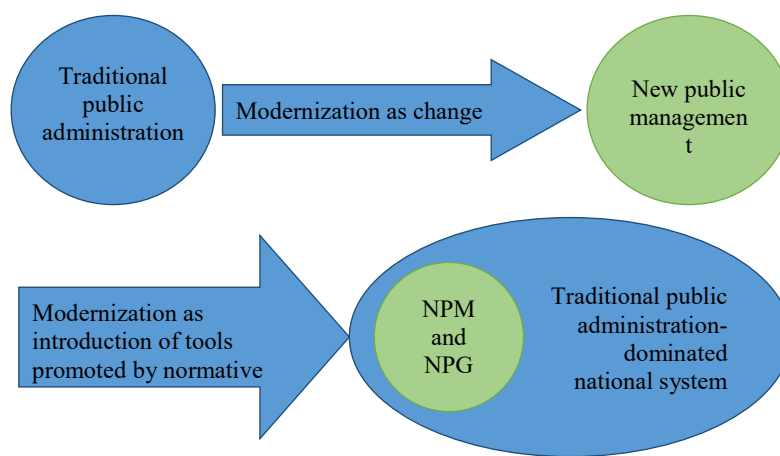


Fig. 1. Explanatory models of modernization of public administration

This analysis is summarized in Fig. 1, which demonstrates how the initial rhetoric of modernization as a shift to NPM in the timeframe of our analysis is better explained as a means of introducing tools that are generally attributed to NPM and NPG within a stable institutional framework, which is grounded in the traditional model.

5.2. Analysis of Latvian, Lithuanian and Slovak public administration modernization

After restoring independence in 1990, Latvia was seeking for the best practice models to reform all spheres of governance. Political reforms were supplemented with complex

reforms in economy and administration. The NPM inspired reforms reached Latvia by the mid-1990s, where Latvia already faced a failure of the traditional bureaucratic model. In order to jump up to speed of the reforms at the beginning of the 1990s the government transferred the main legal pieces from pre-WWII Latvia. Such an approach helped to keep the dynamics of political reforms and legal changes, since the Constitution and basic legal texts creating the constitutional settings of the country were adjusted to the new conditions by keeping up the spirit of pre-WWII Latvia. However, this approach was senseless for reforms in the field of economy and especially, related to public administration, since public administration paradigms had changed a lot over the last 70 years. Since the civil service law based on the Weberian tradition did not work, Latvia accepted NPM because of two factors. The first one was the failure of traditional bureaucracy and the need to restore trust to public administration. The second one – the need to be accepted by the EU. Therefore, internal pressure, together with external pressure from the international community, ensured that lessons from the private sector, contracting, division of service delivery from policy development, and more discretion to public sector leaders were the main parts in the reform agenda in the 1990s [20].

In the 21st century, Latvia has achieved its foreign policy goals – to be a full member of the EU and NATO. However, the requests or quality of public services and added value for taxes paid increased especially after the economic downturn of 2008. By 2009 Latvia had the second highest unemployment rate (19.7 %) and GDP fell by 18 percent [21, 22] being a country hardly influenced by economic crises. During the crisis, the government cut wages in the public sector and social benefits, reformed the pension system, education and health care. Individuals and social groups, shocked by budgetary cuts, requested a more transparent decision-making process and sound justification for public expenditures. As a result, Latvia has achieved conditions where everyone can follow the decision-making process in the ministries and the government. Thus, social enterprises and NGOs have become important actors in service delivery. Even more, civic participation, which is the main aspect of NPG, has been institutionalized by signing a cooperation memorandum between the government and NGOs already back in 2005. By 2017, the number of NGOs that joined the memorandum had reached 424 organizations [23].

Along with a memorandum, relations among public agencies are regulated with different types of relational contracts, described in the Law on Public Administration structure, already adopted back in 2001. All the basic credentials of NPM – contracts, user satisfaction, outputs and competitive markets where public agencies were supposed to be in competition with private sector services – were introduced around the millennium. Thus, the Reform Strategy of 2001–2006 was the first document in Latvia mentioning trust as a new type of governance approach to improve the implementation of policies. However, the main problem was to push the agencies to cooperate and to use joint interdependence for better quality services.

Finally, there was a substantial shift back to interdependent legal drafting, policy-making and implementation. Thus, the other government document “White paper on development of public administration in Latvia in 2014–2020” was developed. This White paper recognizes the governance of processes as a key issue to achieve service effectiveness. The document follows

the ideas [24], which offered to divide all reforms into four stages – rethinking, reforming, restructuring and retrenching. However, so far the government had ignored the organizational networks while offering to simplify both organizational structures and processes. This led to the new type of policy vacuums where some policy fields were reformed heavily, while others muddled through without substantial changes.

Overall, as the practical implementation of reforms as well as government documents reflect quite a clear tendency – NPG is not recognized as a trend or a reform paradigm affecting everyday processes in public administration. However, the public sector performance is improving. Such a positive achievement is a direct result of a set of massive reforms already implemented despite a theoretical model applied.

The context of Lithuania’s path to independence was different from both Slovakia and Latvia in several important aspects. Lithuania was the first Soviet republic to secede from the Soviet Union, 18 months prior to the 1991 August Putsch in Moscow, which precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first democratic election of the parliament in early 1990 still within the Soviet Union resulted in a sizeable Communist Party fraction, the support of which was instrumental in the independence vote. However, this and the 1992 political split of “Sąjūdis” – the movement that brought independence resulted in a period where radical reforms of replacing the Soviet-era bureaucracy with new staff, institutions, and processes never materialized. The parliament decided to call an early election in 1992, and coincided it with the referendum on a new constitution. The constitution, in reflection of the realities of the hung parliament, created a highly complex system of checks and balances, which has caused consistent difficulty to develop and implement comprehensive public administration reforms [25]. Public administration reforms in Lithuania since 1992 can be characterized as incremental, reactive and driven by exogenous factors.

Lithuania consistently runs into difficulties when coordinating different ministerial policy areas in achieving complex policy goals. This leads to ministers pursuing reforms within their own policy areas. In this context, one type of reform is prevalent. The typology of reforms differentiates conditional vs. ideology-driven and sectorial vs. structural [26], in Lithuania’s case the conditional-sectorial type of public administration reforms comes a clear winner. These sectorial reforms are plentiful and there has been little research in assessing their outcomes and causes as well as providing some classification. Some research [27] suggests that the institutional setup and realities of decision-making are favorable to creating highly fragmented government structures, with nearly 1,000 having been established by 2008. The key factor that affected the reduction of the numbers of agencies since were the austerity measures in the wake of the global financial crisis. The term of “drifting” was introduced to characterize the process of underutilizing the achievements of EU integration and economic growth [28]. Reforms, even in ministerial policy areas are often based on exogenous drivers [29], which, understandably, place a premium on fiscal discipline and competitiveness with little regard to the welfare role of the state that citizens may expect.

Also, the prevalence of the conditional-sectorial type of public administration reforms does not mean they impacted governance most. There were several comprehensive exogenous factor driven reforms, and they were not all consistent. As with the cases of Slovakia and Latvia, the policy goals of achieving EU and NATO memberships were important factors in shaping

public reforms, while Lithuania also sought IMF support, and came out of its conditionality's only in the mid-2000's. EU's focus on building administrative capacity meant that modernization of public administration followed parallel trends, of both improving the democratic standards of bureaucracy, and liberalizing public administration according to NPM provisions. The two key laws that were developed and amended to fit the standards of the EU were those of Public Administration and State Service. These laws had a profound impact in developing civil service and administrative procedures that to a large measure manage to continuously improve administrative processes within their areas of responsibility, avoid successful legal action towards the state. Both of these have a few NPM features.

After the conditionality of EU accession, a few comprehensive reforms have been forthcoming. By 2015, one exogenous factor driving reforms was the Lithuania's process of acceding to the OECD. OECD placed several reform conditions in areas such as public enterprise management, labor tax, public health. Many of these policy areas are continuously also noted as lacking by the European Commission in its annual reports [30]. OECD accession has progressively gained political prominence, and some of the parliamentary reform decisions in 2017 directly referred to recommendations from OECD: this includes decisions on state forest management, labor code, and alcohol regulation. Yet in all these cases, the reforms did not go as far as recommendations proposed. The setup of the Lithuanian political decision-making appears to continue favoring the status quo.

The fact that in Lithuania comprehensive reforms only happen when there is a broad consensus in society, and political elite, as was the case with the EU, NATO and Euro is not necessarily a bad thing. As research in the UK suggests, the benefits of launching reforms relatively easily are dubious [31]. Nonetheless, the two combined wicked problems of Lithuania: an unprecedented level of labor emigration to western EU member states, which by some measures a loss of 25 % of the population, and a very high income inequality, by 2017 largest in the EU, are impossible to address without a concerted government effort, and this proves to not be possible.

Three outstanding issues that illustrate the failure to create complex comprehensive reforms are municipal reforms, civil service reform, and development of standardized digital governance architecture. Lithuania is the only member-state of the EU that has not conducted a territorial-administrative reform, and has only one regime for managing municipalities, despite the fact that their sizes vary from just over 3,000 to 550,000 residents. The inability to create legislation for regional administration means that municipalities need to act based on regulation, which is sub-optimal for both larger and smaller municipalities [32]. The law on civil service has not been reviewed since 2003. Despite profound changes in Lithuania's demography and labor market over this time, it has failed to receive a hearing throughout the 2008–2012 and 2012–2016 parliamentary terms, despite being placed on the agenda multiple times. Lithuania also does not have a unified e-governance architecture. It relies on a minimum standard for on-line public service provision and good will of various agencies to digitize their services and develop higher quality services. Small agencies and municipalities often find it prohibitively expensive to procure digital solutions, and when they do they often cannot set requirements that would allow such services to be useful long into the future. In conclusion, the fragmented nature of Lithuania's governance is a place where "island of perfection" can be found [33], but on the flipside the

absence of all-encompassing administrative standards means that public administration lacks capacity to pursue comprehensive reform, and suffers from low citizen trust.

In Czechoslovakia, the necessity of decentralization policy came to light after the successful overthrow of the communist regime in 1989 [34]. The communist institutions were removed practically immediately, but their replacement with a new system of institutions (especially political, administrative, and economic institutions) was more problematic than trouble-free. One of the most visible uncertainties of replacement was related to its pace. The new system of institutions was, in comparison with the removal of the so-called old principles, developed very slowly, and quite often in a chaotic and non-strategic manner. The main purpose of the political and administrative changes was to redesign political and administrative systems considering their improvement and accommodation to the new social and economic conditions. There are some interesting points concerning the replacement of elites (especially at the local level) in Czechoslovakia in the first years after November 1989. First, a more visible elite replacement could be noticed in larger rather than smaller municipalities. And second, in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia, the replacement of "old-timers" was much slower than in the Czech part or in other EEC.

In the mid-1990s, the Slovak political situation was characterized by the absence of the consensual elite. Democratization was everything but simple and straight-lined [35]. Moreover, in 1995–1997, during the era characterized by a 'struggle over the rules of the game' and political instability, the idea of a consolidated democracy in the SR was considered more uncertain than just 'a variant of an unstable regime within the frame of policy-making processes [35]. In this regard, as one of the researchers [36] suggested, the Slovak case is no exception when compared to all the other Central European countries waiting for multi-actor democracy to develop and civic culture to be created. Paradoxically, as it was mentioned above [37], such a complicated political situation activated the third sector and many NGOs, which deal with political issues and take an important part in policy-making processes.

The clear qualitative change in regard to public participation developed after the parliamentary election in 1998 and consequently in 2002, when central governments led by right-wing parties decided to decentralize and modernize the administration. Every member of these ruling coalitions declared a willingness to start a large-scale reform of the public administration system that would lead to its modernization and stronger orientation towards citizens' needs. Such declarations were included in the programme proclamations and were connected with Slovakia's effort to become a full member of the European Union. The first step taken consisted in the elaboration of a few strategic documents that included a basic description of further developments. Each of them invoked the necessity to strengthen the public participation, while granting the authorities to be situated closer to citizens, extending powers to manage the regional or local affairs.

As far as the public administration system is concerned, the government decided and the parliament consequently approved a huge reduction of the general state administration in 2003. The most visible part, from the citizens' point of view, of such a reduction was an abolition of all district state administration authorities and a re-establishment of borough state administration authorities. The main idea of this resulted from a government effort to reduce general state administration, and vice-versa, to strengthen its specialized parts. However,

since 2003, a few other changes have been implemented in this field. The main reason was a huge devolution, which was implemented within the period of 2002–2004 [34]. As for the competences, these were transferred from the sub-system of state administration to the relevant territorial self-government units, i.e. local governments and regional governments – in several periods. The reason why the interested actors took a decision on such a periodical approach was an accentuation of the necessity to provide an adequate time for both the regional governments and local governments to prepare themselves for a proper execution of these competences. However, even if the mentioned periods were longer, it would not be possible for the majority of local governments to be prepared for it, since there are too many very small units, especially in the countryside of eastern and southern parts of Slovakia [38]. The issue of fiscal decentralization became a true “hot issue” of public debate linked to the public administration reform in the following years [39]. All major political parties pledged to decentralize power over public money and all advocated the accumulation of the self-generated revenues of self-government units [40] on both local and regional level. Fiscal decentralization was introduced in 2005. It was not implemented at the same time as devolution, and since it was implemented later, some serious problems appeared. Obviously, it interfered with basic principles of division of political power and responsibility, because these units remained dependent on the central government’s decisions, there was no motivation to utilize their own potential and remove the disconnection between delivering public services and tax payment or low responsibility for public dues [41].

After these changes, the following central governments led by the strongest left-wing oriented party have especially focused themselves on central level. They have tried to make state administration leaner but, at the same time, stronger in terms of competences. All these governments declared that digitalization of public service delivery is one of the most important outputs, but the Slovak public administration system remains among delayed members of the EU in the field of e-Government. In recent years, the “ESO-Reform” (Reform for Efficient-Credible-Open Public Administration System) was implemented and its main goal is to implement several measures that are associated with either NPM or NPG. However, it is too soon to measure its real outcomes. For NPG it is a tightly packed space of debates denominated by a single hashtag of “modernization” (Table 1).

Concluding, it is possible to assume that in all analyzed countries NPG is implemented as a measure that corresponds better to the principles of the EU as propagated services for the citizens.

augmentation if not a replacement of democratic institution to policy implementation control. But replacing bureaucratic institutions with NPM might be dangerous for transition countries with a weak tradition of rule of law inherited in the traditional bureaucratic model [42]. And social tensions that have emerged over the past 30 years have created the conditions for considering further alternatives. However, it is unclear if these can take over the modernization label from NPM or digitization of government.

The post-2008 global financial crisis period has introduced this paradoxical process with a new element, that of NPG. The crisis seemed to undermine both the market and hierarchy based ways of governing, and a focus on networking and social inclusion gained popularity in public debates. Yet as the overview of the three countries suggests, despite the shifts of rhetoric, the content of reforms has shifted little with legalism remaining a pervasive element of new policy implementation, while elements of NPM being introduced when needed to maintain countries’ standing as international investment-friendly areas. But community or network based ideas about governance are nothing new. These ideas clearly constitute a separate stream of thought in public administration [43], and do lead some governments to proactively promote civic engagement and civil society so as to find new partners for policy formulation and implementation [44]. But how they could inform large state administrative bodies with a 30 year-long path of institutionalization in EEU is an open question. To begin with, the discourse of NPM has not gone anywhere, and the efficiency gospel in all three countries is maintained with the focus on digitization clearly being the focus of reforms.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine that NPG could ever amount to NPM achievement in EEU policy, and that is in full recognition that a legalist governance is now the established *modus operandi* of EEU governments.

Hood’s [4] system of three administrative value groups is more complex in comparison to the binary unidirectional unmodern-to-modern way of discussing public administration reform. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that unless the unmodern-to-modern is replaced by the more flexible discussion on what values we want nation-states to pursue, it is hard to imagine that EEU states would become areas of implementation of consistent NPG reforms.

That such discussions can occur, we know from the history of the collapse of communism. What we do not know is what could precipitate that discussion now. It seems that neither the global financial crisis, nor Brexit has been such external triggers. It also does not seem that the political and institutional shifts that frame communal modes of governance through the lens of

Table 1

NPG implementation rhetoric

Country	Implementation
Latvia	NPG is not part of official modernization jargon, however subsequent governments attempt implementing citizen participation tools in public administration
Lithuania	NPG is not prioritized over NPM, certain elements are implemented as means of better compliance with EU requirements
Slovakia	NPG as decentralization, where public access to decision-making is better

nationalism affect Latvia, Lithuania or Slovakia. And this seems to be a new contrast within the region in comparison to the larger EEU states of Hungary and Poland.

So we propose a generalization by which New Public Governance is not likely to become a “modernization” trend of public administration reforms in Latvia, Lithuania, or Slovakia without some trigger to which the threshold is

5. 3. Normative models and the particularities of their practical implementation

NPM appears attractive because it offers both agency and responsibility to public officials and seems to offer an

quite high, of the likes of failure of multinational institutional setups, e.g. a major institutional overhaul of EU. Indeed, it is a stretch of the imagination to claim that political elites define their modernization efforts through NPM or NPG theory.

Rather the NWS's view that the larger normative models are unlikely to be implemented as a policy agenda reconstructing the core administrative state is to be taken. Fig. 2 demonstrates that the introduction of various tools is somewhat fragmented and subordinated to the stable administrative core. NWS's normative aspect from this point of view emphasizes the capacity to deconflict disparate tools and integrate them to support, not hinder effective governance.

Fig. 2 confirms the conviction once more that NPG reforms serve as a modernization tool, which is adapted to the principles of traditional public administration. It is possible to call that as an integral part of NWS reforms.

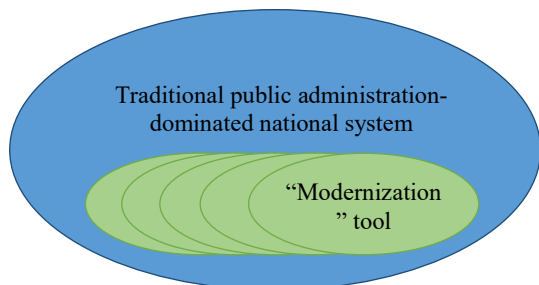


Fig. 2. NWS's model of modernization as tools of public administration introduction

6. Discussion: theoretical implications for normative models

The three countries we studied have shown a remarkable similarity in outcomes of how their administrative systems function. We believe that several factors common to all three were and remain at play: the near simultaneous post-communist transformation, which introduced similar constitutional features to these systems, an effect of EU integration, which was the key priority of national elites, which allowed the institutional system to strengthen and stabilize, and the relatively small size of these countries, which push them in the direction of continued compliance with demands of integration. Equally, the open nature of the economies forces administrative systems to maintain a pro-modernization attitude by introducing various novel tools to the administrative toolbox.

This study contributes to the academic discussion on models of public administration, as it describes the NWS as an adaptive system, which maintains the core elements of national administrative states, but are able to introduce multiple tools (modernize) that allow these systems to adapt to current demands while maintaining institutional stability of the state.

Normative models of public administration are often portrayed as alternatives to each other. Our proposed model (Fig. 2) allows demonstrating the core elements of national public administrations, and identifying their limits of change within their legal constraints.

Yet the model lacks predictive power to identify indigenous factors that may cause a change of core institutions. As a result, this study provides a basis for a more detailed study of EU member states of similar size and institutional organization. This study is based on overviews of modernization initiatives of Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia [15, 20, 25, 27, 29, 38]. Compared to other studies by the authors mentioned here, in this paper the process of submissions has brought to it more and more features that are considered to be fundamental policy problems, such as social stratification, complex and burdensome administration. The limitation of this study is

that it cannot anticipate if these salient problems, which are likely possible to resolve through major reform, as opposed to the notion of modernization and have the potential to change the current modernization agenda. The study also points in the direction of distinguishing the notions of administrative reform and modernization in a clear manner. Within the NWS reforms would constitute changes induced in the political domain due to their salience, and not necessarily in line with professionals in the executive area, whereas modernization are efforts by the executive to achieve adaptations through change management both at the level of a single institution, or the administrative domain overall.

Methodologically, more detailed research might need building or integrating a database of modernization efforts and creation of their typology; which was beyond the scope of this study. Such a development of this study may allow identifying more nuance and potential for change in the national administrative systems, which may be currently overlooked by researchers and policymakers.

This study reviewed selected countries that are often cited as success stories of the post-communist transformation by applying the analysis of openly available data, and case study publications. This approach has certain limitations; it does not allow developing a typology of factors that would cause concerned administrative systems to change their model of operation. The period that was overviewed demonstrated that these systems are stable, but various technological, social and security factors have accumulated over this time, and our methodology does not offer a mechanism that would allow anticipating a major institutional shift. A comprehensive solution to this problem might be a study that would encompass a larger set of country cases, and would have a unified data system, which would correlate quantitative measures of administrative systems to major institutional shifts. This could become a basis for an observatory, which could provide a comparative analysis of small and medium-sized states in Europe. As our study suggests, the application of theoretical models in practice are contingent on the conditions in given administrative systems. An observatory might offer assessments of how new theories might be applied, and what would drive and resist change in a given state.

7. Conclusions

1. Public administration modernization is a rhetoric device that may mean different things in a specific context. We observe that in the initial period of post-communist transformation it was described as a shift from a traditional administrative normative model of public administration towards NPM. However, the first decades of the 21st century have demonstrated that these attempts did not imply profound institutional reform. Rather a model whereby the underlying institutional mechanisms of public administration have become stabilized over the past three decades, and the national administrative systems of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia can be described as having a basis in the traditional administrative model with various tools of NPG and NPM introduced within it.

2. Country case analysis of Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia demonstrated important regularities of the content of administrative modernization. Despite varying rhetoric differences in modernization and reform agenda, the governance practice outcomes are rather similar, and so institutional-historical, mimetic and exogenous factors appear to

cause stabilization of administrative systems to a point that they share very similar features among themselves.

3. In this research, significant similarities were found between the three countries regarding the mechanisms of modernization. The rhetoric that aligns to normative models is an element of modernization efforts, but no country has implemented a model wholesale. Rather, the findings of the study support recent theorizing on NWS, with its emphasis on distinguishing an administrative systems core hierarchical nature and institutions. Modernization can introduce tools that stem from NPM and NPG, but does not affect the core institutional mechanisms.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this research, whether financial, personal, au-

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The manuscript has no associated data.

Use of artificial intelligence

The authors confirm that they did not use artificial intelligence technologies when creating the current work.

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