

TWO FACES OF INTERNATIONALISATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY
Between government innovation and transgovernmental imitation

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Abstract

Whereas domestic public policy is increasingly penetrated by international governmental organisations, domestic government institutions seem less adaptive. This puzzle triggers the following question: To what extent is the internationalisation of domestic administrative policy moulded by domestic government? Put more starkly, how intimate relationships exist between domestic government decision-making and domestic policy? The paper outlines one organisation theory perspective emphasising a tight coupling of ministerial decision-making and administrative policy, and one supplementary perspective advocating a loose coupling of government decision-making and administrative policy through transgovernmental processes of imitation. Reporting from the area of administrative policy and based on survey data on civil servants in the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Government Administration (MGA) (N = 140), this paper demonstrates that Norwegian administrative policy has become strongly internationalised whilst the decision-making processes of MGA is only moderately internationalised. The analysis indicates a partial de-coupling of MGA decision-making and the internationalisation of administrative policy. The internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy seems only partly steered and forged by the domestic top ministerial leadership, and partly affected by the import of administrative models from international governmental organisations.

Introduction¹

Domestic public policy is in transition at the crossroads of national and supranational governance (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Kohler-Koch, 2003; Wessels, Maurer and Mittag, 2003). Observing that domestic policies adapt with less friction towards international governmental organisations (IGOs) than domestic government institutions (Olsen, 2003a; Radaelli, 2004), this paper poses the following question: To what extent is the internationalisation of public policy governed by domestic government institutions? Put more starkly, how intimate relationships exist between government decision-making and public policy (Kohler-Koch, 2003, 11)? Reporting from the area of administrative policy the research question is phrased as follows: To what extent is the internationalisation of domestic administrative policy moulded by domestic government? Drawing on survey data from the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Government Administration (MGA), the research hypothesis is that the decision-making of the MGA ultimately forms administrative policy. The alternative hypothesis is that administrative policy is loosely coupled to MGA decision-making and forged by the dynamics of transgovernmental imitation. Whereas pre-existing research on administrative policy strongly emphasises policy path-dependencies, policy editing and policy translations (e.g. Olsen 2003a; Sahlin-Andersson 2002), this paper highlights that administrative policy reflect the mix of government innovation and transgovernmental imitation. Administrative policy is ultimately the result of governmental decisions to innovate and transgovernmental processes of imitation. The empirical observations benefit from a survey, conducted in 2003, on the decision-making behaviour among MGA civil servants (N=140).

Administrative policy is targeted at instrumentally changing the formal organisation, procedures and staffing of public administration (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000, 8).

Administrative policy includes those sets of goals, problems and solutions that aim at consciously reforming public administration. Administrative policy is partly introvert directed towards reorganising the government apparatus internally, and partly extrovert focused on redrawing external organisational borders towards local and regional government bodies, private sector, civil society, and IGOs. The internationalisation of administrative policy exhibits different faces (e.g. Olsen, 2003b). In this study internationalisation signifies administrative policy becoming increasingly penetrated by and becoming similar to administrative policies in other countries and IGOs (convergence in outputs). Extensive internationalisation signifies existing core-properties of domestic administrative policy being replaced by new core-properties and that existing and imported policy properties are merged and fused. Moderate internationalisation implies that existing policy components are supplemented with new components and that they live side-by-side but remain mutually distinct.

In operational terms, the end-product of internationalisation is measured as the adaptation of elements from the global New Public Management (NPM) package (Hood, 1991; Sahlin-Andersson, 2002, 43). Representing the administrative orthodoxy during the past 20 years, based on public choice theory and managerialism, the NPM reform package has emphasised that a radical surgery and replacement of core-properties of existing government institutions and procedures is needed (Aucoin, 1990; Olsen, 1996; Peters and Savoie, 1994). NPM is a multi-dimensional reform brandy focusing on government efficiency and effectiveness, on drawing clear-cut boundaries between politics and administration, between buyers and suppliers, and between regulators and service providers (Geri, 2001, 447). The NPM reform package also focuses on horizontal and vertical organisational specialisation of government units, on contracting out, on professional and generic leadership, on monitoring results on the

basis of explicit standards and measures of performance, and on privatisation and the contracting-out of public service production (Hood, 1991, 4). “[T]he private sector provide[s] the inspiration” (Peters and Savoie, 1994, 421).

Nation-states are increasingly penetrated by abrupt and piecemeal transformational pressures from IGOs. This tendency is documented in the recent power and democracy-studies in Denmark and Norway, and increasingly felt within the field of administrative policy (Geri, 2001; Togeby et al., 2003; Østerud, Engelstad and Selle, 2003). Moreover, whereas some scholars picture IGOs as key motors in the transformation of nation-state policies (Cowles, Caporaso and Risse, 2001; Kohler-Koch, 2003; Wessels, Maurer and Mittag, 2003), others advocate that the IGO-effect is moderate and strongly associated with existing national government institutions, traditions and practices (Anderson, 2002; Olsen, 2003a). These contending conclusions reflect the complex, puzzling and poorly understood linkages between IGO-dynamics and nation-state transformations (Radaelli, 2004). Among the paradoxical observations is the fact that policy changes at the nation-state level seem imperfectly associated with institutional changes at the EU level (Olsen, 2003a). At the more general level, these puzzles highlight poorly understood dynamics between the formal organisation of government institutions and the public policy crafted by it (Egeberg, 2003). This paper suggests two faces of internationalisation of administrative policy: First, internationalisation as government innovation (H1), secondly, internationalisation as transgovernmental imitation (H2).

This paper demonstrates that Norwegian administrative policy has become increasingly internationalised whilst the decision-making processes of the MGA are only moderately internationalised. The analysis *indicates* and illustrates a partial de-coupling of domestic

government decision-making and the internationalisation of administrative policy. The internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy is pictured as partly steered and forged by the government and partly the result of transgovernmental processes of imitation through IGOs such as the European Commission and the OECD.

The paper proceeds as follows: The next two sections outline two faces of internationalisation and applies two theoretical perspectives to explain these. First, an organisational theory perspective advocates an intimate and causal relationship between ministerial governance and policy dynamics. Assuming a less intimate relationship between government decision-making and administrative policy, a network approach is suggested. The third section introduces the empirical record. The empirical analysis proceeds in two steps. Step I accounts for the internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy based on existing bodies of research. Step II analyses empirically the decision-making behaviour of civil servants in the Norwegian MGA. The empirical puzzle *illustrated* is to what extent the decision-making behaviour of MGA officials (STEP II) accounts for the internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy (Step I).

Two faces of internationalisation

We may envisage two distinct faces of internationalisation in the realm of administrative policy. First, a 'traditional conception of administrative internationalisation' champions that internationalisation is fostered by transgovernmental processes of imitation that is loosely coupled to government decision-making. A second conception of 'emerging patterns of administrative internationalisation' assumes a tighter and causal link between government decision-making and administrative policy.

For centuries the norms, resources, organisational capacities, routines and personnel pertaining to the formal organisation of domestic public administrations was loosely coupled to domestic government. In the middle ages the Catholic Church, through the international Church administration, the Catholic educational system and the common Latin vocabulary, was an important facilitator of organisational standards of public administration in Europe. National top civil servants were socialised into European cosmopolitans through the Catholic Church. European universities also contributed to secular learning and socialisation of national civil servants and contributed to shared notions of public administration among top civil servants in Europe (Knudsen, 2002). According to this pictures, administrative policy in Europe was subject to transgovernmental diffusion and learning and there was a lack of domestic organisational capacities, recourses, routines and traditions for instrumentally manipulating the domestic administrative policy. Henceforth, administrative policy was loosely coupled to domestic governance. From the Peace of Westphalia (1648) administrative policy became slowly engrained into territorial sovereignty (Knudsen, 2002).

This brief presentation of a ‘traditional pattern of internationalisation’ emphasises pan-European imitation of administrative forms and practices. Internationalisation results from transgovernmental diffusion and learning of administrative standards, often linked to individual civil servants engrained into transgovernmental networks that expose the officials to shared perceptions of administrative standards (Knudsen, 2002, 38). This ‘traditional pattern of internationalisation’ is less affected by government steering than by learning processes among pan-European circles of civil servants and by external actors such as management consultants, independent ‘think-tanks’ and academics (Knudsen, 2002, 39; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000, 20). “Processes of internationalisation [were] neither supported nor effectively hindered by government actions...” (Gornitzka, Gulbrandsen and Trondal,

2003, 26). This is the century-old mode of “voluntary” internationalisation where national administrative ‘policies’ mirror those of neighbouring countries, governments and ministries (Engel, 2003, 244). “Due to lack of trial-and-error learning across time, actors often search for learning across space – internationally – in order to reach desired goals” (Gornitzka, Gulbrandsen and Trondal, 2003, 27).

New emerging patterns of internationalisation of administrative policy have emerged during the last 20 years. These patterns supplement the ‘traditional’ pattern by being less driven by “voluntary” imitation among individual civil servants. Administrative policy has emerged as an independent domestic policy area supported by a formal administrative apparatus with established routines for administrative reform, permanent staff and economic resources (Grønlie, 1999). After centuries of administrative internationalisation through the pan-European university institution, the nation-state increasingly defines administrative policy as a part of its territorial sovereignty. Moreover, IGOs like the OECD and increasingly also the EU have set new standards and rules for administrative policy to which domestic administrative policies comply. IGOs are not neutral vessels that merely aggregate the administrative policies of the member-states but transformative institutions with independent administrative policies, administrative capacities and fiscal resources to reform the administrative policies of the member-states (Marcussen, 2002). According to this conception, domestic administrative policy is increasingly penetrated by international hard laws (like EU directives) and international soft laws/standards (like those submitted by OECD’s PUMA committee). New patterns of internationalisation thus imply that domestic administrative policies are crafted by legal rules, formalised norms and codified standards of appropriate administrative policy established by domestic government *and* IGOs (Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000; Kohler-Koch, 2003; Olsen, 2003a).

The ‘traditional’ and the ‘emerging’ patterns of internationalisation reflect different causal mechanisms. Arguably, the internationalisation of administrative policy reflects inbuilt tensions between policy innovation and imitation. A reform-optimistic organisation theory perspective is suggested (H1), emphasising a tight coupling of government decision-making and administrative policy (the ‘emerging pattern of internationalisation’). Administrative policy is ultimately the result of government decisions to innovate. Secondly, a reform-pessimistic network approach is advocated picturing a loose coupling of government decision-making and administrative policy through transgovernmental processes of imitation (the ‘traditional patterns of internationalisation’) (H2). Combined, H1 and H2 maximises the criteria of analytical parsimony and power in accounting for the internationalisation of domestic administrative policy (Wildavsky, 1987, 4).

H1 An organisation theory approach.

An organisation theory perspective assumes a direct and intimate relationship between the formal organisation of public administration, the decision-making processes being evoked and ultimately the public policy produced (Egeberg, 2003). This approach shares the classical assumption of Samuel E. Finer, namely that “the regime type influences the politics of the regime” (Qvortrup, 2003, 135). This is a reform-optimistic perspective arguing that the administrative policy observed is a direct product of wilful political-administrative leaders who have comprehensive insights into and power over administrative reform processes (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002, 24). Comprehensive or first-order reforms of administrative policy are crafted by powerful executive institutions with relevant means-end knowledge and considerable political and administrative resources (March and Olsen, 1989).

This perspective departs from the assumption that formal organisational structures mobilise systematic biases in public policy because formal organisations provide cognitive and normative shortcuts and categories that simplify and guide decision-makers' behaviour and role enactment (Simon, 1957). Organisations provide cognitive maps that simplify and categorise complex information, offer procedures for reducing transaction costs, give regulative norms that add cues for appropriate behaviour as well as physical boundaries and temporal rhythms that guide decision-makers' perceptions of relevance with respect to public policy (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; March and Olsen, 1998). Government officials resemble the 'administrative man' faced with computational limitations with respect to the potential mass of problems, solutions and consequences present (Simon, 1957). Owing to the bounded rationality of decision-makers, the horizontal specialisation of government institutions systematically reduces the attention of decision-makers into a limited number of relevant considerations (Gulick, 1937). Moreover, by carving the organisation into vertical hierarchies of rank and command the decision-making behaviour evoked by civil servants are guided by the political-administrative hierarchy through disciplination and control (Lægreid and Olsen 1978, 31). Public policy is thus the result of hierarchical imposition and horizontal departmentalisation of organisational structures where an exclusive group of participants, problems, alternatives and solutions reside (Olsen, 2003a). This perspective also departs from an instrumental approach that sees political and administrative leaders as instruments which may be utilised to realize political goals (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002).

In our case, the internationalisation of administrative policy is forged by the Norwegian government apparatus (the MGA), with its own organisational capabilities, permanent staff, routines, economic resources, distinct reform-language, and shared mental maps. The internationalisation of administrative policy becomes an embedded bureaucratic routine

forged by the horizontally and vertically organised ministry. The government apparatus is not a neutral tool available to the political majority in office, and there is not a neat separation between the political sphere and the administrative sphere of government. Administrative policy is crafted by the vertical ministerial hierarchy of political will and administrative command, and convened within horizontally specialised ministerial units and divisions (Gulick 1937).

According to this perspective the decision-making behaviour of MGA officials is likely to be reflected in the administrative policy crafted by this Ministry. The internationalisation of administrative policy is thus fostered by an *ex ante* internationalisation of decision-making behaviour among the MGA civil servants. We thus anticipate a parallel amount of internationalisation of decision-making processes among MGA officials and in the field of administrative policy. Moreover, observed correlations between (i) government decision-making and (ii) administrative policy indicate a *causal* effect from (i) to (ii).

H2 A network approach.

There is a growing literature on governance by network, or ‘governance without government’, which champions that public policy is less intimately associated with government hierarchy and less bound to the nation-state (Bogason and Toonen, 1998, 214; Kohler-Koch, 2003).

Networks are seen as “informal, intricate and unstable with an unlimited number of participants” and contribute to mutual interpenetration of actors from different branches of government (Van Warden, 1992, 30).

Domestic civil servants constantly engage in transgovernmental networks that transcend the control of the domestic ministerial leadership (Jönsson, 2001, 205). These networks blur

several government levels, notably the national and supranational levels of government. Transgovernmental networks cut across territorial borders and involve domestic civil servants as autonomous, interdependent and interwoven partners (Marin and Mayntz, 1991, 18). Transgovernmental networks may be normative networks providing norms of appropriate administrative standards, and they may be epistemic networks with shared assumptions of causal relations between for example the organisation of government systems and administrative productivity (Haas, 1992). Transgovernmental networks may be strongly institutionalised, providing the participants with shared preferences, identities and beliefs, and they may be loosely connected issue networks with few endogenous dynamics (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992). Transgovernmental networks foster the emergence of complex, overlapping and interconnected webs of actors, solutions and consequences that cross-cuts and challenges domestic governance (Kohler-Koch, 2003, 12). Arguably, domestic civil servants may adopt shared perceptions of appropriate administrative policy by participating in transgovernmental networks (Sahlin-Andersson, 2002). Often based on informal and interpersonal actor-constellations, the frequency and intensity of contact among the network-members may cause a transgovernmental socialisation of the participants (Börzel, 1998, 259; Rhodes and Marsh, 1992, 184). Studies suggest that such tightly coupled networks may develop distinct norms, rules and practices that contribute to an international standardisation of policy (e.g. Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000). Transgovernmental networks represent webs of poorly co-ordinated government institutions and decision-makers, accompanying uneven and fragmented processes of internationalisation of public policy within different domestic government institutions (Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch, 2003, 16). Consequently, the emergence of transgovernmental networks are likely to contribute to fragmented, segmented, and loosely coupled national administrative policies.² This argument challenges environment deterministic approaches arguing that, “a country may adopt internationally based norms and

beliefs about how a public business should be organized and run simply because they have become the prevailing doctrine” (Lægreid et al., 2004, 11).

Transgovernmental networks are sometimes formalised within IGOs, like the OECD’s PUMA committee and EU’s web of expert committees (Marcussen, 2002; Trondal, 2004). Formalised policy networks are likely to move from being pure *exchange relationships* among independent actors to become formalised and institutionalised networks that socialise the network participants towards shared perceptions of administrative policy (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal, 2003; Richardson, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 2002, 45). IGOs like the OECD codify, compare and categorise reform concepts and integrate national officials in webs of expert committees where they become partly re-socialised into cosmopolitan advocates of international policy doctrines (Sahlin-Andersson, 2002). Domestic administrative institutions and civil servants that are embedded into such formalised transgovernmental networks tend to engage in international copying of best practices, imitating international standards of appropriate administrative policy (Egeberg and Trondal, 1997; Massey, 2004, 25).³ In EU phraseology formalised transgovernmental processes of imitation is labelled the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), focused on “a process of mutual learning based on peer pressure” (Kaiser and Prange, 2002, 4). Also OECD’s PUMA committee organises best practice exercises through the production and dissemination of reports (Marcussen, 2002). Processes of imitation of best practice tend to reduce local search for innovative solutions simply because there is an inbuilt tension between imitation and innovation (Olsen, 2004, 6). In sum, the network approach advocates that the internationalisation of domestic administrative policy is less forged by domestic government decisions and innovation than by loosely coupled processes of internationalisation where government institutions and civil servants imitate what is perceived as legitimate and efficient international standards of administrative policy.

Method and data

The empirical observations offered in STEP II of the empirical analysis are based on a survey among A-level civil servants in the Norwegian MGA (officials involved in policy-shaping duties which require a university education). The survey, conducted in 2003, is based on a standardised questionnaire mailed to all A-level civil servants of the MGA (233). The response rate of the survey is 60 per cent, giving a sample of 140 respondents. This response rate equals the response-rate in similar survey studies in the Norwegian central administration (e.g. Christensen and Egeberg, 1997).

The empirical analysis follows in two steps. Drawing on existing bodies of empirical research, Step I reports on the internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy. Step II applies the above survey data to analyse the decision-making behaviour of the MGA officials. However, one methodological caveat is needed: Evidence of correlation between the decision-making behaviour of MGA officials (STEP II) and the internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy (STEP I) is merely an *indication* of causation, not proof thereof. These correlations can be causally related either ways. For example, a creeping internationalisation of administrative policy may foster a *post hoc* internationalisation of government decisions. However, our interpretation is the orthodox one (H1): Evidence of a perfect match between decision-making processes and policy dynamics is interpreted according the organisation theory perspective.

Research findings

STEP I: The internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy.

The Norwegian administrative policy has become increasingly complex by the import of NPM ideas that supplement existing administrative policy based on Weberian ideals of political loyalty and professional neutrality (Lægreid and Pedersen, 1999). NPM elements are added to the pre-existing policy repertoire, contributing to greater policy complexity. According to Lægreid and Pedersen (1994, 13), the increased number, correlates and hybrids of problems and solutions included in Norwegian administrative policy has made it less instrumental and less governable.

Still, reforms of administrative policy have become a routine activity in Norway (Lægreid et al., 2004). Between 1947 and 1997 almost 400 white papers on administrative policy reform were produced and an increased share of those reports comes from the MGA (Rolland, 1999). Many of these documents have been heavily influenced by IGOs. The post WWII period has witnessed a proliferation of IGOs of which a few have demonstrated capabilities for changing domestic administrative policies, notably the OECD and the European Commission. The power of IGOs within the field of administrative policy has increasingly caused Norwegian MGA officials to direct their attention, energy and resources towards the IGOs. “[T]he OECD ... act[s] as an ideational arbitrator that helps initiate a common learning process in the national public administrations. Consequently, the OECD today welcomes more than 40.000 national civil servants in its committees on an annual basis, thereby allowing for direct policy deliberation with a view to developing a common scheme of reference across national boundaries” (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland, 2004, 23).

Whereas NPM reforms often are pictured as initiated and spread by the OECD’s PUMA committee, the European Commission today occupies a stronger *de facto* role as administrative policy entrepreneur. The Commission has traditionally had few organisational

and economic resources and legal capacities for reforming domestic administrative policy (Olsen, 2003a). However, the Commission has directed increased attention to how domestic administrative bodies are organised in order to secure effective implementation of EU *aquis communautaire*. The Commission cannot direct or instruct adjustments in domestic administrative systems, but they increasingly use subtle and informal methods to secure administrative compliance (Statskonsult, 2003:3, 34). For example, the Commission increasingly pleads for a vertical specialisation of regulatory activities by establishing semi-autonomous agencies at the EU-level and within the member-states (Statskonsult, 2003:3). The *aquis communautaire* of the EU Internal Market increasingly accompany reforms of Norwegian administrative policy within affected policy areas, for example in the fields of pharmaceutical administration, alcohol control policy and in the administration of food safety (Moen, 1998; Ugland, 2002; Veggeland, 2004). In Denmark, the clearest shifts in Danish administrative policy came after the EU membership in 1973 (Grønnegård Christensen, 2002, 63). Similarly, Egeberg and Trondal (1997) demonstrate that processes of transgovernmental imitation of administrative policy are constant over time whereas administrative reforms due to EU regulations increase over time (Egeberg and Trondal, 1997).

Finnemore (1996) reveals that the widespread trend of establishing national research councils reflects the fact that countries adopt OECD and UNESCO standards of how to administer research activities. Similarly, Trondal (2002) demonstrates how Norwegian administrative policy within the field of research and higher education adapts to the EU research policy (H2). Hence, IGOs are more than neutral vessels and intergovernmental organisations. They are indeed transformative institutions with independent impact on domestic standards of appropriate administrative policy (Olsen, 2003a). IGOs are both transgovernmental epistemic communities and transgovernmental normative communities that socialise national civil

servants into shared notions of appropriate policy standards (Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland, 2004). It is foremost domestic civil servants, not politicians, who participate in IGO expert meetings and hence who become carriers of administrative policy ideas (Lægreid and Pedersen, 1999, 14) (H2). IGOs are transformative institutions where administrative standards are imported, adjusted and exported as well as arenas where national civil servants learn about them. Hence, the import of administrative policy has been depoliticised and fragmented in domestic bureaucracies. Administrative policy reforms have been more adequately co-ordinated *within* national ministries like the MGA than across ministries (Trondal, 1999).

Both in Norway and in the OECD the notion of embedded reform or contextualised NPM have gained ground (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002). Witnessing the influence of government decisions, the NPM concept has been adjusted to accommodate different and conflicting Norwegian policy concerns, like rule of law, political loyalty, professional autonomy, spheres of non-intervention, and integrated participation (H1). Sahlin-Andersson (2002) reveals that OECD's PUMA committee provides broad policy prototypes for how to reform domestic administrative policy. Within these broad policy categories, however, there are ample room for national governance and the influence of existing domestic administrative structures (H1).

Studies of the Europeanisation of public administration in the Nordic countries demonstrate that the politico-administrative leadership is fairly de-activated, particularly in Norway (Jacobsson, Lægreid and Pedersen, 2004). Whereas the European Commission contribute to a fragmentation and segmentation of the Norwegian public administration, the Council of the European Union contributes to strengthen political accountability and national co-ordination

in the member-states (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal, 2003). Illustrative, the European Union *aquis communautaire* affect Norwegian policy sectors differently accompanying different administrative challenges to different agencies and directorates (Statskonsult, 2003:3).

There is a neat fit between the sectoral organisation of the European Commission and the sectoral organisation of the Norwegian administrative apparatus. Norwegian administrative policy is organised into semi-autonomous sectors and often directed more by sector-bureaucrats than by a coherent political leadership (Grønlie, 1999, 338). The Norwegian administrative apparatus for comprehensive and coherent administrative reforms is modest (Christensen and Læg Reid, 1997, 371; Olsen, 1996, 188). The MGA has modest power in this regard compared to the combined capacities of the Ministry of Finance, the sector ministries and the semi-autonomous agencies beneath the ministry level.⁴ Hence, the sector-organisation of the public administration is reflected in a corresponding sectoralisation of administrative policy (H1). Christensen and Læg Reid (1998) demonstrate that NPM reform elements are received differently in the various Norwegian ministries.

For example, Norwegian hospitals have been reorganised and become vertically de-specialised from the regional level to the state level of government. At the same time, semi-autonomous regional authorities are established to monitor and control the new state-owned hospitals (Torjesen and Gammelsæter, 2004). One effect of this reform has been that local hospital managers increasingly develop local rationality directed at strategically, flexibly and creatively maximising local preferences (Torjesen and Gammelsæter, 2004). Trond Nordby (1993) documents that the administrative policy within the Norwegian health sector is strongly influenced by existing bureaucratic routines within the administrative apparatus (H1) as well as by international standards of health administration (H2). In the university sector,

Tom Christensen (1991) shows how the adoption of NPM reforms within the Norwegian university sector is both closely tied to government reform efforts (H1) and strongly filtered by institutional rules and practices at the university level. Finally, Einar Lie (1995) reveals that administrative policy within the Norwegian Ministry of Finance has become strongly filtered by existing traditions and institutionalised practices. Generally, NPM ideas seem to spread globally whereas NPM policies are implemented differently in different policy sectors (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002). Even IGOs adapt flexibly to NPM elements. Geri (2001, 253), reveals that none of the six UN agencies studied “is implementing a comprehensive set of NPM reforms”. NPM reforms are biased and filtered by the existing administrative structures and practices within the IGOs (H1) (Hood, 1991, 8).

Administrative policy has accompanied changes in administrative practice, however, less in Norway than in other Anglo-Saxon countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000). Reforms of administrative practice seem larger at local and regional levels of Norwegian government than within the central state apparatus, and more paramount within the administrative branch of decentralised agencies than within the political echelon of national ministries (Forsell, 2002, 280). Examples include simplification of laws, budgeting reforms, improved service procedures, etc. NPM in Norway is pictured as incremental-transformative change where new vertically specialised administrative bodies and management-by-objectives procedures supplement existing hierarchical structures and rule-based administrative procedures (Christensen and Lægreid, 2002). The Norwegian administrative system remains intact, however, increasingly penetrated by efforts at comprehensive administrative innovation as well as external pressures from IGOs to imitate “global standards” of administrative policy.

STEP II: Decision-making behaviour among MGA officials.

Egeberg and Trondal (1997) report that an increased share of Norwegian civil servants at the ministerial level works on international issues (24 per cent in 1976 and 33 per cent in 1996). The data on Norwegian MGA officials reveals that every fourth official work on international issues (24 per cent).⁵ Another indicator of internationalisation of decision-making behaviour is the extent to which civil servants copy international standards of best practice. Whereas 68 per cent of the Norwegian civil servants did this in 1996, 62 per cent of current MGA officials report that they copy models or best practice from other countries (Egeberg and Trondal, 1997, 347).⁶ Similarly, 46 per cent of the MGA officials report that they copy models and best practices from IGOs.⁷ These findings indicate that transgovernmental processes of imitation are important mechanisms of internationalisation within the Norwegian MGA. These observations also indicate that bilateral imitation (among states) is more important than multilateral imitation (through IGOs). “Norway seemed to reform some time after Britain” (Olsen, 1996, 16). Finally, 51 per cent of the MGA officials report that they are affected by the EU and/or the EEA agreement, mirroring the general tendency that Norwegian civil servants are increasingly participating in EU institutions and become penetrated by EU institutional dynamics (Egeberg and Trondal, 1997, 351; Jacobsson, Lægreid and Pedersen, 2004; Trondal, 1999).⁸ However, comparative studies also indicate that Norwegian civil servants are less internationally oriented and less active participants within EU institutions than Danish, Finish and Swedish government officials (Jacobsson, Lægreid and Pedersen, 2004; Trondal and Veggeland, 2003).

Table 1 reveals the national and international contact patterns among MGA officials.

-- Table 1 about here --

The contact pattern evoked by MGA officials is clearly associated with the vertical MGA hierarchy by the fact that their contacts are strongly directed towards their own politico-administrative leadership (H1). The contact pattern is also strongly associated with the horizontal ministerial organisation by the fact that the amount of contact is stronger within than across ministerial borders. Notably, whereas 73 per cent of the officials have contacts with agencies beneath their own ministry, only 32 per cent report contacts with agencies underneath other ministries (H1). Moreover, the contact patterns are directed more strongly within their own ministry than towards IGOs. The most important contact-point internationally is ‘other international organisations’, notably the OECD (including the PUMA committee), ILO (the International Labour Organization), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (ordered by preference) (H2). Finally, MGA civil servants have considerably more contact towards ‘other international organisations’ (40 per cent) than towards the Norwegian Parliament (8 per cent). These findings at least *indicate* that transgovernmental imitation (H2) indeed supplement decision-making within the realm of the domestic government apparatus (H1).

The officials were also asked to indicate if they have participated in EU committees “one time or more” during the last year (2003). Ranked by frequency, 17 per cent reported participating in other international committees, 13 per cent in Commission expert committees, and 8 per cent in EFTA and/or EEA committees. However, few MGA officials are active participants in these international committees. While 10 per cent report giving oral presentation in ‘other international organisations’ “fairly often or more”, 9 per cent report giving oral presentations in Commission expert committees “fairly often or more”. This level of activity is slightly below average compared to officials from other Norwegian ministries, let alone officials from other EU member-states (Beyers and Trondal, 2004).

Next, Table 2 reveals the concerns deemed important to MGA officials.

-- Table 2 about here --

Civil servants have several organisational affiliations and cues for action, and also multiple role expectations (Jacobsen, 1960). Table 2 clearly shows that MGA civil servants take into account several considerations when making decisions within their own portfolio. Notably, Table 2 demonstrates that the decision-making behaviour of MGA civil servants reflect the vertical specialisation of the MGA by the fact that they emphasise signals from their ‘own’ politico-administrative leadership (H1). MGA officials are also Weberian bureaucrats who take into account procedures and laws, and they are professional experts who emphasise professional considerations. Furthermore, MGA officials are ‘modern’ civil servants who emphasise modernisation and reform. Less importance is assigned to the interest of other countries and IGOs. Those IGOs considered important are (ranked by preference) the EU, OECD, EFTA/EEA institutions, and ILO. In sum, the decision-making behaviour of MGA officials is governed by multiple concerns, notably by government hierarchy and the horizontally units and divisions, professional considerations and rule compliance (H1) Less emphasis is put on NPM concerns and the main carriers of NPM reform ideas – IGOs (H2).

In addition, the officials were invited to assess claims concerning the degree of behavioural discretion available to them. According to H1 the decision-making behaviour evoked by government officials are guided by formal rules and codified norms. The data, however, indicates that whereas 66 per cent of the MGA civil servants report that they “always” decide on the basis of their professional expertise, 45 per cent act on behalf of hierarchical

instructions. Moreover, whereas 27 per cent of the officials claim that they “always” choose what decisions they should take, 15 per cent “always” have clear instructions about what decisions they should take. Hence, contrary to H1, the degree of behavioural discretion available to MGA officials is fairly great. At the same time, the majority of the officials are governed by clear rules and practices (64 per cent)⁹. Hence, despite MGA officials consider themselves as professional experts with behavioural discretion at their disposal (H2), they are also governed by ministerial rules, established practices and hierarchical command (H1).

To underscore the above observations, Table 3 reveals the institutions deemed important by MGA officials.

-- Table 3 about here --

Importantly, the MGA politico-administrative leadership is considered important. Notably, the administrative leadership is considered more important than the political leadership, reflecting the fact that MGA civil servants have considerable more contacts with the administrative leadership than with the political leadership (Table 1) (H1). Hence, those assessments reported in Table 3 reflect the vertical and horizontal organisation of MGA: Officials have more contact with their own politico-administrative leadership than with other ministries, and more contact with agencies beneath their own Ministry than with agencies below other ministries. Importantly, the Norwegian Parliament is considered important to 64 per cent of the officials. Hence, despite few MGA officials have personal contacts with the Parliament (Table 1), this institution is deemed important. This observation suggests that the Parliament may affect ministerial decision-making through anticipated reaction. Finally, Table 3 demonstrates that IGOs are considered less important than domestic government

institutions. MGA officials consider the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) as *the* most important IGO. Other EFTA and EEA institutions and the European Commission are perceived as less important than the ESA.

The officials were also invited to respond to the following assertions:

-- Table 4 about here --

Consistent with the findings in Tables 1, 2 and 3, Table 4 demonstrates that the decision-making behaviour of MGA officials is mostly associated with their domestic leadership, their professional expertise and ministerial rules and practices (H1). Table 4 reports that the majority of MGA officials do not consider IGOs as more important today than “earlier”. In fact, bilateral contacts with governments in other countries are deemed equally important as the European Commission and the ESA.

The final question targeted is to what extent H1 and H2 explain NPM concerns among MGA officials (emphasising modernisation and reform). In the following OLS regression analysis H1 is tested by the two following variables: (i) Formal rank position of MGA officials, and (ii) the extent to which MGA officials have leadership tasks. H2 is measured by the following two variables: (iii) the extent to which MGA officials copy models from other countries and from (iv) IGOs.

-- Table 5 about here --

Table 6 reveals no significant coefficients and should thus be interpreted with caution. The strongest observation is that officials with leadership tasks tend to emphasise modernisation and reform more than officials with no leadership tasks. There is also a weak positive relationship between formal rank position and the tendency of emphasising modernisation and reform. These observations indeed support H1. Furthermore, emphasis on modernisation and reform is associated with copying models from IGOs rather than from other countries (H2). Hence, NPM policy elements seem to be partly emphasised by top rank officials with leadership tasks (H1), and by those officials who import models from IGOs (H2).

Conclusions

The empirical observations reported demonstrate that the field of administrative policy has become strongly internationalised whilst the decision-making processes of MGA is only moderately internationalised. Moreover, existing administrative policy is not replaced but supplemented by new NPM components. The analysis *indicates a partial* de-coupling of government decision-making (Step II) and the internationalisation of administrative policy (Step I). Administrative policy seems only partly steered and forged by the top ministerial leadership. The capacity for intentionally reforming administrative policy seems modest in the Norwegian case. The role of the Norwegian MGA has been more that of helper, motivator and stimulator than that of an instructor and director in the implementation of NPM reforms in the 1990s (Christensen and Lægreid, 1997, 378). The observations presented above support this conclusion. The transgovernmental diffusion of administrative policy ideas have accompanied a loose coupling of government decisions and administrative policy. The internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy thus resembles the ‘traditional pattern of administrative internationalisation’ which is loosely coupled to government oversight. The mere fact that the MGA officials reported that EU, OECD, EFTA/EEA institutions and the

ILO are important IGOs when copying international models and standards reflect transgovernmental processes of imitation (H2).

However, the analysis also supports the orthodox organisation theory perspective (H1). The internationalisation of Norwegian administrative policy seems to be fostered by a mix of learning dynamics within transgovernmental networks (H2), and government decision-making and policy innovations (H1). However, the internationalisation of administrative policy seems less coupled to government control than assumed by organisation theory orthodoxy (H1). The internationalisation of administrative policy reflects “learning and voluntary imitation” within transgovernmental networks, not only hierarchical imposition (Olsen 2003a: 512).

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TABLES

Table 1: “Can you estimate how often you had contacts with the following during the last year”?* (per cent)

The political leadership (Minister, State Secretary and/or Political Advicors)	46
The administrative leadership (Director General, Secretary General)	88
Other sections or department in MGA	90
Other ministries	79
Agencies beneath the MGA	73
Agencies beneath other ministries	32
The Norwegian Parliament	8
The European Commission	4
The Council of Ministers	2
EFTA’s Surveillance Authority (ESA)	2
Other EEA/EFTA institutions	7
Other IGOs	40
Mean N	132

* Values 1 and 2 combined on the following five-point scale: very often (1), fairly often (2), both and (3), fairly seldom (4), very seldom (5).

Table 2: “What importance do you assign to the following concerns when doing your work?”* (per cent)

Modernisation and reform	65
Signals from the political leadership (Minister, State Secretary, Political Advisors)	85
Signals from the administrative leadership (Director General, Secretary General)	87
Professional considerations	92
Proper procedures, current law	86
The interests of IGOs	24
Mean N	126

* Values 1 and 2 combined on the following five-point scale: very important (1), fairly important (2), both and (3), fairly unimportant (4), very unimportant (5).

Table 3: “How important are the following institutions when central decisions are made within your portfolio?”* (per cent)

Own political leadership (Minister, State Secretary, Political Advisors)	79
Own administrative leadership (Director General, Secretary General)	91
Other ministries	50
Agencies beneath the MGA	53
Agencies beneath other ministries	20
The Norwegian Parliament	64
The European Commission	19
The Council of Ministers	13
EFTA’s Surveillance Authority (ESA)	27
Other EEA/EFTA institutions	19
Other IGOs	15
Mean N	117

* Values 1 and 2 combined on the following five-point scale: very important (1), fairly important (2), both and (3), fairly unimportant (4), very unimportant (5).

Table 4: “Please consider the following assertions”*: (per cent)

“The European Commission has become more important than earlier within my portfolio”	35
“Other EU institutions have become more important than earlier within my portfolio”	27
“EFTA’s Surveillance Authority (ESA) has become more important than earlier within my portfolio”	32
“Other international organisations have become more important than earlier within my portfolio”	14
“Bilateral contacts with governments in other countries have become more important than earlier”	33
Mean N	125

* Values 1 and 2 combined on the following five-point scale: very correct (1), fairly correct (2), both and (3), fairly wrong (4), very wrong (5).

Table 5: Factors relating to the extent to which MGA officials emphasise modernisation and reform (beta) a, b

(i) Formal rank position	.15
(ii) Leadership tasks	.24
(iii) Copying models from other countries	-.21
(iv) Copying models from IGOs	.18

*) $p \leq .05$ **) $p \leq .01$

$R^2 =$.07

- a) *Diagnostics of collinearity between the independent variables in this table unveil no indications of extreme multicollinearity*
- b) *The dependent variable has the following values: Very important (value 1), fairly important (2), both/and (3), fairly unimportant (4), very unimportant (5). The independent variables have the following values: Formal rank position: Executive officer (1), higher executive officer (2), principal officer (3), assistant director general (4), deputy director general (5), director general (6), and positions over director general (7). Leadership tasks: Yes (1), No (2). Copying models from other countries and from international organisations: Very often (1), fairly often (2), sometimes (3), fairly seldom (4), very seldom (5).*

NOTES

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2 Several variables may be coupled and de-coupled in public administration: the organisation and its environment, the horizontal and vertical formal structures of the organisation, the past and present, as well as talk, decisions and action (Brunsson, 1989; Weick, 1976; March and Olsen, 1979). Ideas about public administration often spread faster than the practice of public administration, contributing to a situational and sequential de-coupling of administrative policy and practice (Brunsson, 1989; Christensen and Lægreid, 2002).

3 Such processes may be more or less conscious: It may be based on a utility-maximising calculus or borrowing best practice from others, or on a cognitive process of imitating environmental demands.

⁴ Whereas the Ministry of Finance is a powerful actor in domestic administrative policy in countries like Denmark, Sweden and Ireland, the Norwegian Ministry of Finance has an ambiguous role in Norwegian administrative policy (Statskonsult, 1996:12, 22).

⁵ This involves officials devoting some, fairly much and very much of their working time on international issues.

⁶ This involves officials collecting ideals very often, fairly often or sometimes.

⁷ This involves officials collecting ideals very often, fairly often or sometimes.

⁸ This involves officials who are affected to a very great extent, to a fairly great extent and somewhat.

⁹ Value 1, 2 and 3 combined on the following five-point scale: very clear rules and practices (1), fairly clear rules and practices (2), both/and (3), I have to use fairly much discretion (4), I have to use very much discretion (5).

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