

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON. REVITALIZING SOCIETAL CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Most scholars in public administration and management research would agree that there is a connection between the culture of a nation or region and the way management in public administration is structured and working (“public management arrangements”). However, to be incorporated into public management research and theory, a more precise notion about the forms, ways, and mechanisms of the interlinkage between societal culture and public management is required. A look into public management literature reveals that wide use and reference is made to the importance and influence of culture on public management arrangements - mostly, though, using the term “culture” as a short-cut for “organizational culture”. Public management treatises stress the influence of past events and contexts for the specific functioning and establishment of organizations, rules, and perceptions which in turn have great influence on the reception and functioning of public management mechanisms (Heady, 1996; Schröter, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Elsewise, organizational culture - or more precisely change thereof - is claimed to be the result of public management efforts (Ridley, 2000; Schedler & Proeller, 2000). In sum, the interlinkage between culture and public management is there, but is not systematically and explicitly incorporated by referring to adequate theory. Although cultural theory has gained considerable attention (Hood, 1998), there are still other concepts for the analysis of cultural facts that may be of interest to the subject, too.

As public administration and management discussion is getting international attention, scholars in public management as well as internationally acting practitioners have become aware of the impact of societal culture on the range of options a country has for the design of public administration. One precondition for a better consideration of cultural elements in public management reforms is a better understanding of culture itself. This paper explores how the understanding and mode of effects of culture which are used in public management literature correspond to notions and conceptualizations in theoretical approaches which have culture itself as their research object. Our objective is to outline different theoretical approaches to study the linkage between culture and organization, and highlight the reception and implications of these approaches for the analysis of culture in public management research. This should lead to insights for a more systematic and more theory-based consideration of culture in public management debate.

¹ The authors wish to express their gratefulness to Lisa Novotny-Schlegel who contributed a lot to this paper.

THE MEANINGS OF CULTURE

The concept of “culture” is an attempt to explain differences in the behavior of diverse groups of actors in situations that are objectively alike. For this purpose, these groups of actors need to be formed, typical features of behavior need to be defined and explained by non-rational elements. Culture research, therefore, is the search for the shared subjective, which only becomes materialized in a mutual sense-making process among the actors of this - what we will call - cultural group.

The term culture has been said to be one of most complicated words because it is used to describe important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought (Williams, 1976). Its popularity appears to be inversely linked to its precision and unambiguousness (Jann, 2000). A study from the 1970s already revealed 160 varying definitions of culture (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1967; Faure, 1993). We will try to give a short overview of how the term culture has been received in social science and management literature. At this point, our objective is to give a sketchy idea of the "mainstream" understanding and notions of culture in organizational and management literature. Hereto, we explicitly abstain from pointing to facets and various receptions in specialized literature and studies. Since culture became an omnipresent word in this literature, we want to highlight the main drifts of meaning of culture in common understanding

Societal culture

From the perspective of social science and organizational analysis, the most significant usages are those stemming from anthropology. There, culture is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and interpreting them. An explanatory definition says culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1967). Of course, this is just one definition which might seem arbitrary at this point of our discussion. Nonetheless, it highlights that culture in academic analysis has a subjective and objective dimension, includes values, behavior, as well as artifacts, and is communicated and transmitted by explicit and implicit forms. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1967) have provided a categorization of definitions of culture which is shown in Table 1. The categories are not exclusive, but refer to different elements and aspects of culture and, by this, highlight the facets of the term.

Aspect of Definition	Component	Comment
ENUMERATIVELY DESCRIPTIVE	Overview of the content of culture	Universality of ideas, behavior, aims, restrictions, etc. that are shared by a cultural group.
<i>Historical</i>	Focus on social heritage, tradition	Cultural elements, such as values, behavior, artifacts, material goods, etc., inherited or passed on among a cultural group.
<i>Normative</i>	Emphasis on ideals or ideals plus behavior	Prescribed behavior and values that serve as a guidance for people concerning how to act in different sociocultural situations.
<i>Psychological</i>	Culture as socialization device for learning, habit, adjustment, problem-solving	Cultural elements, such as values, behavior, artifacts, material goods, etc. serve purposes or solve problems for the cultural group and influence cultural learning of commonly understood behavior and values.
<i>Structural</i>	Organized pattern of elements	Cultural elements exist within an organized pattern, based on societal hierarchies and relations, and serving as a “tool kit” of commonly understood customs.
<i>Genetic</i>	Genesis of symbols, ideas, artifacts	Emphasis on origins and evolution of culture. Explaining factors that made it possible for culture to origin and develop.

Table 1. Definitions of Culture. Source: Following Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1967) in Srnka (2005)

In empirical social science these broad definitions of culture are hard to grasp and difficult to operationalize. Nevertheless, it must be noted that a bulk of usage of the term actually refers to exactly this broad understanding of culture, namely shared values, norms, behavior, rules, and symbols in a specific social group (Jann, 2000).

Organizational culture

With respect to culture in the context of organizational studies, Dingwall and Strangleman (2005) show that classical studies like Taylor's, Fayol's, and Mayo's already clearly identified the phenomenon of culture in their treatises, even though they had not yet labeled it that way. Jacques' (1951) *The Changing Culture of the Factory* seems to have been the earliest use of the term culture within organizational studies in a published title.

To be more usable for social sciences, and organizational science in particular, a differentiation and splitting of the meaning of culture has developed. Organizational scientists like early Crozier (1964) argued that all organizational structure and action has a cultural basis in society. The relationship between societal culture and management (culture) can be analyzed in a hermeneutic circle that tries to interlink the part (public management) with the whole (society). Thirty years later, Mercier (1994) has voted for a hermeneutic understanding of the culture-management interlinkages, focusing his research on the context and past history of an organization.

Another important twist to the understanding of culture in the context of public management research was added by the organizational and corporate culture literature

of the 1980s (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1992). According to this literature, organizational culture refers to basic assumptions and beliefs which members of an organization have in common. It also includes rituals, behavior, and corresponding organizational forms. As a new aspect, it was claimed that organizations not only possess culture, but also can create culture, and moreover, that the *right* culture is a trigger for efficiency and effectiveness. In this functional perspective, culture has become an object of management just like strategy and structure.

This is a fundamental difference in the use of the concept of culture in the management literature opposed to most social science definitions. To extremes, in managerial writing culture is being subjected to the quest of rational management, while other social sciences stress reflectivity of social life in which culture cannot be altered in order to achieve outcome (Wright, 1994; Jann, 2000; Dingwall & Strangleman, 2005). This short overview stresses how the term culture has evolved and has been used in popular common language in management and organizational literature which also had a great influence on public management scholars. It shows that there are different stances on various aspects of the study and inclusion of culture.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN OVERVIEW - HOW TO THINK ABOUT CULTURE

In this section we will explore various theoretical approaches which analyze culture and organization to discuss their understanding of culture and the respective implications for public management and administration research. Our aim is to highlight implicit assumptions and varying aspects among different approaches. The overview will give orientation points for public management researchers on how to think about culture in their studies and how to undertake research. Different ways of conceiving organization and culture will directly influence the way the conception of culture is used by researchers. It is these conceptions that we want to focus on.

In the following we will shortly examine four different approaches that emerged for studying the interlinkage of culture and organization. First, the *sociocultural approach* will be discussed. Here, we have grouped literature which argues that institutional performance is explained and linked by socioeconomic and cultural factors. The second category comprises studies that heavily rely on concepts and methods of cultural analysis to study organizations and their development. We have labeled those approaches as *culturalist*. Thirdly, we will examine the stances of *neo-institutionalism* on cultural aspect, while discussing the historical, sociological, and rational-choice branches. Lastly, we will turn to the literature on *functionalist approaches*, such as corporate and organizational culture. These four categories are not mutually exclusive and are combined in many studies. Our categorization aims at distinguishing approaches that have been developed and perceived as a distinct school of thought in the literature and which have added and applied a unique notion on the conceptualization of the interlinkage of societal culture and public management

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORIES

Probably the earliest modern study that explicitly focused on cultural aspects in the public sphere has been conducted by Almond and Verba (1963). In *The Civic Culture*, their basic interest was to explain why in the 1920s and 1930s democracy was able to stabilize in some countries but not in others. In the wake of behavioral sciences, *The Civic Culture* was the first systematic attempt to explain polity outcomes with cultural variables (Laitin, 1995). Almond and Verba studied the social and cultural forces interlinked with political institutions and introduced new concepts, such as *political culture* and *civic culture* to explain political behavior. In the elaboration of the concept of political culture, Almond and Verba (1980) stressed political knowledge and skill, as well as feelings and value orientations toward political objects and processes - toward the political system as a whole, toward the self as participant, toward political parties and elections, bureaucracy and the like. Civic culture, on the other hand, describes the interaction between personal and political satisfaction and public trust. Both concepts are crucial to institutional stability as they account for the acceptance or rejection of public organization. This approach thus devotes special attention to behavior influenced by non-political and cultural institutions, such as social environment, school, or work place. The authors argue, that unless a society's political institutions are congruent with its underlying political culture, those institutions will be unstable. Based on these assumptions, Almond and Verba examine public attitudes and competences and conclude that the civic culture is a mixed political culture. It consists of both modern and traditional traits, incorporating active participation as well as tributary behavior, either supporting or rejecting public organization (Almond & Verba, 1963). Within the sociocultural approach, culture represents an independent variable which influences outcomes concerning democracy and administration through a (changing) hierarchy of values (Inglehart, 1977). Although culture is a conservative element in social evolution, it gradually adapts to ongoing changes in values. This can enable an amplification of the citizen's political competences through social transformations, e.g. better accessible and improved education and lower costs for political information, which in turn is able to modify political culture (for an overview of the development of political culture research see Inglehart, 2006).

In the meantime, this notion of *political culture* has been broadened and elaborated by the authors themselves as well as by others, and especially also has included attitudes toward public policy, and opened the notion of culture beyond the limitation to "a set of attitudes" (Laitin, 1995). Eckstein (1966; 1988) inquired how authority relates to culture and showed how cultural change can give rise to political change. Inglehart (1997) found that nearly all societies that rank high on self-expression values are stable democracies, whereas the evidence suggests that a culture that is high on tolerance, trust, subjective well-being and an activist outlook is conducive to the emergence and survival of democracy, rather than it would support the other way around theses of democracy fostering self-expression values. In a more recent seminal study, Putnam (1993) - even though himself not a representative of the sociocultural approach, his results are in line with this approach - investigated under what conditions public institutions serve the public interest and argued that the success or failure of democratic institutions reflect the degree to which a culture of trust and participation is present (note the parallel to the rationale of Almond's and Verba's study). The conclusion of this study leads to the appraisal that democratic institutions

cannot be built from top down (or at least not easily). They must be built up in the everyday traditions of trust and civic virtue among its citizens (Laitin, 1995).

Intriguing as the study of political culture is, it is only of indirect interest for scholars of public management. Of much more interest should be studies with a clear focus on public administration and its functioning. In a later article, Anechiarico (1998) studies the differences in anti-corruption policies in the Netherlands and the United States and follows that different societal values are leading to diverse civil society phenomena, most importantly a higher level of civic engagement of Dutch citizens compared to their US counterparts. This results in considerable differences in administrative culture and problem solving policies, although both administrations are based on bureaucratic structures and processes. He concludes that

administrative culture is not an autonomous, causal factor in the public sector. Administrative culture is both the sum of historical and political factors and an indicator of the contemporary interaction of political and structural forces. (Anechiarico 1998, p. 29)

From an organization theory and public management point of view, the sociocultural approach can be described as contextualist. March and Olson (1989) see the major theoretical significance of contextualist ideas in their general inclination to see the causal links between society and polity as running from the former to the latter, rather than the other way around. Analogical application of this rationale to public administration and public management outcomes could imply that organizations, structures, and management practices will only be supported (and successful) when they are congruent with the existing culture. Since the sociocultural approach implies a unidirectional model, public management has hardly any possibility to influence culture in turn. Typical research settings of this approach seek to explain institutional outcomes by cultural attitudes and tradition. In this body of literature, culture is most often seen as something stable and external to public management.

This approach to societal culture is wide-spread in public management and administration research, especially in comparative administration and international public management. The neglect of cross-cultural differences, it is argued for instance, has led international organizations such as the OECD or the World Bank to promote “one-size-fits-all” solutions to developing countries, with sometimes disastrous effects (Arellano-Gault, 2000). According to Caiden and Sundaram (2004, p. 376),

when countries have relied on foreign experts, the outsiders have too often ignored domestic circumstances and confused matters by incorporating their foreign values. Imposed reforms (by elites) have been formally adopted but informally evaded.

Schick (1998) has even argued that most developing countries should not implement public management reforms such as demanded by international organizations, *inter alia* for reasons of cultural differences. For scholars of international public management, the consequence lies in a need to analyze societal cultures as a relevant context for public management arrangements, understanding them as independent external variables of their study.

CULTURALIST THEORIES

Analogous to the study of culture in society, a stream of literature deals with the study of organization from an anthropologically oriented perspective. We are referring to these approaches as culturalist theories of organization. Organization is studied and perceived as culture and the epistemological and methodological approach to study organization builds on those of anthropology.

As noted before, culture in anthropology is conceptualized in many different ways. A wide spectrum of methods is offered for the study of organization as culture. Smircich (1983) analyzed that organization theorists tend to draw their cultural analogies on views of culture from cognitive anthropology, from symbolic anthropology, and to a lesser extent, from structural anthropology and psychodynamic theories. In *cognitive anthropology*, also known as ethnoscience, culture is a system of shared cognitions or a system of shared beliefs and knowledge (Goodenough, 1981). The research interest is to determine the rules, and learn how the members of a culture see and describe the world. Accordingly, organizations are perceived as structures of knowledge, cognitive enterprises, or master-contracts whose "grammar", the rules and scripts that guide action, needs to be discovered. This approach highlights that thought is linked to action, and by that stresses the place of human mind in organizations. In the *symbolic perspective of anthropology*, societies, e.g. cultures, are seen as systems of shared symbols and meanings and the task is to interpret the "themes" of a culture, meaning the open or hidden understandings and postulates that orient or stimulate action (Geertz, 1983). It is traced how symbols are linked in meaningful relationships and how they are related to activity. Interpretation is the key method in this perspective. In interpreting an organization, the focus will be on how individuals interpret and understand their experience and how these interpretations and understandings relate to action. In the *structural and psychodynamic approach*, culture is the expression of unconscious psychological processes. Accordingly, organizational forms and practices are seen as projections of unconscious processes and the dynamic interplay of unconscious processes and their conscious manifestation is analyzed. The purpose of study is to reveal hidden, universal dimensions of the human mind.

The particular stance of this approach to the study of culture and public management is very different from the sociocultural approach. First, it is to note that culture and organization are not treated as separate entities or variables, but that organizations are considered as cultures and analyzed as such. In consequence, in organizational studies culture is treated as any kind of variable that is defined independently of the organization, for example as a nation, but also as something that emerges within and accomplishes organizations. Culture then is not a variable to describe and explain organization, but a metaphor for organization (Smircich, 1983). Second, in this perspective, action, behavior, and development within organization is guided by the meaning and sense-making that members attribute to it. Herein lies a very different explanation to functionalist approaches, such as they are often found in public management literature. Structures, operating procedures, and rules are argued to be in place because they serve a purpose, as for example to guarantee legality, ensure effectiveness or efficiency. On the contrary, cultural analysis of organizations would argue that such manifestations could only be explained by the actual meaning they have for the members. Finally, it should be noted that culturalist approaches rely on

specific methodological techniques ranging from ethnographic to symbolic analysis, but also on (quantitative) analysis of attitudes, beliefs, and texts.

For the mainstream scholarship in public management, culturalist theories have had little significance and impact so far. As far as we can trace it, it has evolved into an epistemic approach of relational constructivism, which has gained significance in organizational theory. Recently, some scholars complained that public management theory had lost touch to organizational theory and its latest findings. Kelman (2005) therefore suggests that public management needs help from general management research. It can be expected that the revival of an exchange between public and private management research would also bring relational constructivism into play in public management theory.

INSTITUTIONALIST THEORIES

A very influential incorporation and consideration of cultural aspects for organizational studies has been experienced by neo-institutionalism, especially in its historical and sociological occurrence, and to a lesser extent also in rational choice. Institutions are formal and informal rules and regulations within an organization or polity, and they have a major impact on social and political outcomes as they pre-determine available options for the behavior of the actors within the organization or polity. Since they structure collective behavior and generate distinctive results, institutions create common knowledge by serving as a basis for social and political interaction.

Among institutionalist theories, there are different approaches to the study of the process of origin and change of institutions and how the relationship between institutions and behavior is construed. As established approaches in the study of politics, three “sub-theories” have been discussed in several treatises (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Aspinwall & Schneider, 2000). In this chapter, we will concentrate on the discussion of the cultural element within them. Cultural elements play a role and appear in all types of neo-institutionalism, and yet they differ substantially in the conceptualization and form of influence of culture.

Historical institutionalism

For historical institutionalists, institutions are the result of the past history of an organization. Nevertheless, the supporters of this approach do not exclude other causal forces. Historical institutionalists devote a lot of attention to comparative historiography and stress the existence of path-dependencies (North, 1990; Putnam, 1993). In different organizations, equal causes do not necessarily lead to equal consequences, as the results and the outcome of a certain policy are depending on the institutional context in which it takes place. At this point, historical institutionalism opens up for the influence of culture. Culture is a characteristic of the institutional context and is related to the mutual interpretation of historical experience within an organization. Historical institutionalists define institutions as formal and informal procedures, rules, norms, and conventions, which are coupled to organizational design of society. In the culturalist sub-branch of this approach people are considered to behave bounded rationally and to be influenced by their environment and routines (*homo sociologicus*). Institutions, in turn, define the identity and preferences of

people. In this notion, organizational development is a historical process and hardly a rationally planned one.

The analysis of culture and public management in the tradition of the historical institutional approach often has specific characteristics. Firstly, culture is seldom precisely conceptualized or defined. Reference is mostly made to highlight specific traditions and beliefs at the national level which seem plausible and relevant to explain certain traits and developments. Thus, culture is usually understood as national culture or political culture. Secondly, argumentation in a historical institutional tradition not only sees culture as an external variable, but organizations can also shape culture in the sense that strategies induced in organizations today may ultimately affect and shape self-images and preferences of actors of tomorrow. Then, culture becomes an additional perspective on the organizational level. Thirdly but more rarely, culture is an interdependent variable in the analysis, influencing and being influenced by organization and management. Yet, there is a clear difference to the approaches of cultural analysis, since a historical institutionalist would still treat culture and organizational elements as two distinct factors (or variables). Lastly, historical institutional analysis tends to give ex post rationalization of reforms. Varying reception and implementation is explained - ex post - by historical or cultural differences, or administrative traditions. Barzelay and Gallego (2006) subsume Pollitt's and Bouckaert's (2000) *Public Management Reform* to this strand of theory, which supports our findings that most of comparative public management research in the past years has been mainly based on historical institutionalism.

Sociological institutionalism

Culture and cultural elements have received special attention in the approach of sociological institutionalism. In line with this school of thought, the reason for organizations to exist is not rational selection of actors. Rather, organizational forms and practices should be seen as culturally specific. Organizations do not necessarily enhance a means-end efficiency, but are the result of interactions associated with the transmission of cultural processes. Hall and Taylor (1996) highlight three particularities of this approach, which are also highly relevant for our objective to explore the interlinkage of culture and management. Firstly, institutions are defined not just as formal rules, procedures or norms, but also include a system of symbols, cognitive scripts, and moral framing. Secondly, the relationship between the organization and individual action is highly interactive and mutually constitutive and institutions affect behavior by normative and cognitive dimensions. Thirdly, organizations embrace specific institutional forms or practices because the latter are valued within a broader cultural environment: organizational change happens as it does because it enhances social legitimacy.

This approach parallels the culturalist theories discussed before, starting from a similar understanding of culture. Both approaches include cognitive, symbolic, and normative dimensions to the definition of culture. Further, both consider organizations as cultures which ask for a culturally specific analysis. Yet, there are also differences between the two approaches, even though a sharp distinction cannot be made. While cultural analysis approaches focus on the deciphering, interpreting, and reading of implicit and hidden information and grammar within organizations and therefore take a more organizational-anthropological stance, sociological institutionalism can be

interpreted as a development of this stance geared towards the explanation of creation and change of organizations based on a structuralist argument.

For international public management research, the fact that new organizational practices are adopted to enhance social legitimacy, and not to advance any means-end efficiency (Hall & Taylor, 1996), urges scholars to understand the socio-cultural context of any public management reform. By this, sociological institutionalism offers an intriguing explanation to the dissemination of similar organizational practices and isomorphisms worldwide. Studies discussing the influence of the EU-accession process and its accompanying consulting programs on the public management reform agenda of candidate and new member states, such as Phare, can be considered to follow this stream of argument (Proeller & Schedler, 2005). Additionally, sociological institutionalism stresses the normative and cognitive structures, in which action and practices are embedded and which address the individual sense-making in daily practice. Faced with a situation, an individual must find a way to recognize and to respond to it, whereby the institutional scripts and templates provide a means (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Barzelay and Gallego (2006) have argued that examples for this approach are well represented in public management literature. They cite examples of studies which highlight the imitative behavior of agencies as well as the normative and cognitive structures institutionalized in the public service. Strong focus on legal education and high representation of jurists among the public servants, for instance, leads to a persistent and high adherence to legal values.

Rational choice institutionalism

Rational choice institutionalism in its original shape is based on theories of rational behavior and strategic interactions within organizations. Institutions act as a structuring force in all sorts of social interactions as they indicate possible behavior within a society without much regard to the specific cultural environments. Linked with cultural analysis, however, rational choice serves as an important instrument in analyzing social interactions (Cohen, 1974). Also Max Weber's sociological theory considered social reality to be constructed by the interaction of both strategic *and* cultural forces. As opposed to the sociocultural approach, here culture is treated as a product of primordial and rational interactions and hence is not dependent on the individual attitudes of citizens. In rational choice based cultural theory, culture systems are given and individuals are confronted with them. Culture shapes identities, values, and preferences of individuals.

Laitin (1986) also reverts to rational choice to construct a “second face of culture”. Uniquely to this approach, parallel existence of several cultures is proclaimed, which in consequence also makes individuals not only subjected to one, but to several cultures, and individuals can strategically choose which culture system they are referring to in a given situation. In this way, culture is apriori given on the one hand, and instrumentalized as a means to the (political) end on the other. The “second face of culture” is based on the combination of the rational choice approach and cultural analysis. It fuses opportune notions with the analysis of cultural preferences in a given society. By examining common symbolic systems and applying cost-benefit considerations, this approach aims at framing a “cultural rationality model” of a given group to predict individual and collective action of its members. While the symbolic aspect of this compound approach focuses on “primordial identities”

transmitting preferences and tendencies of a given social system, the rational factor implies how given cultural systems transform to actual effects. On that account, culture and organization are treated separately. That is to say that culture essentially comes into play on the level of suppositions and utility functions, and organization stands for explaining and describing outcomes based on the assumption of rationally acting agents and the structuring force and functionalist character of institutions. To be able to explain and predict real outcomes, Laitin (1986) argues that it is crucial to call rational choice into play as “(...) political outcomes are largely a function of the real pressures people face in daily life (...)” (p. 172) , and cultural analysis by itself lacks the capacity to establish stable theoretical frameworks. Intertwining the cultural with the rational approach suggests a more realistic possibility to study the interlinkage of culture and polity. Rational choice based cultural theories explain the political importance of culture as they elaborate on the relevance of culture as a pool of (political) resources. Cultural resources are similarities, such as race, language, religious beliefs, or habits which facilitate communication and reduce transaction costs. In the context of public management discussion, this approach reflects in the debate on different "roles" which individuals and groups can take on. Roles are based on given cultural resources and allow, or even ask, individuals to apply different reasoning and value concepts wearing the cultural uniform of the group. In the process of strategic bargaining (Hood, 2000) for limited resources, elites and counter-elites make use of the given cultural resources in a political manner to mobilize masses in order to reach profit-maximizing outcomes. In public management terms, different cultural dispositions and the political instrumentalization thereof make it difficult to transfer public management concepts among social environments: a public management reform might be successful in one place, but fail miserably in another.

FUNCTIONALIST THEORIES

Literature on *organizational culture* - or a term that specifies this view better: *corporate culture* - refers to culture as an organizational element from a managerial perspective. Culture is analyzed in relation to management challenges and outcomes. Typical areas of interest are the impact of culture on management outcomes (Parker & Bradley, 2000), influence of culture on change processes (Reschenthaler & Thompson, 1998), and the determination of certain "types" of culture and their effect on management (Renshon, 2000).

In the development of the corporate culture debate, three phases are distinguished which refer to the conceptual and methodological sophistication (Dülfer, 1991). Stimulated by the success of Japanese companies and a following search for cultural differences which account for their success, culture was considered and analyzed as external determinant in the initiating phase. The second phase was strongly influenced by management bestsellers and practice-oriented work in which corporate culture has been established as field of management and success factor for management. In the third phase, the methodological and epistemological sophistication and maturation has taken place. But also in this approach a lot of variations to the study of culture can be observed and the developments described in the other approaches in this section also reflect in this group of research.

A common trait in this body of literature is that corporate culture has been an important *tool* to manage corporate change and that outcomes have been linked to, or

even dependent on, culture. Even though this notion is particularly typical for earlier works of this approach, it continues to be taken up throughout contemporary writing on organizational culture (Osborne & Brown, 2005). As regards the question what organizational culture is, the early and influential works of Deal and Kennedy (1982) describe four elements of organizational culture: values, heroes, rituals, and networks. Peters and Waterman (1982) identify seven success factors that characterize "excellent" companies and ascribe them to basic values existing in those organizations, but not in others. Generally, works on corporate culture see values as well as patterns and actual, observable behavior as key elements. As mentioned before, corporate culture literature often does not restrict to a descriptive-analytical analysis of organizations, but seeks to find out about the interlinkage to managerial outcomes. In consequence, this leads to the question whether the culture of an organization is changeable so that managers can shape "a success-supporting culture". According to Schein (1992), different levels of culture should be distinguished: the visible, symbolic artifacts and the underlying basic assumptions and values. The latter are embedded in societal values and practices, so that there may be country-specific features of organizational cultures.

These functionalist theories have found many followers in public management research. To many, changing the administrative culture is a major task of public management reforms - with the final aim of a more efficient and effective public administration (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Claver & Llopis, 1999; Ridley, 2000). Many reform programs and prescriptive contributions to reform approaches address the need for a change of culture and depict a vision for the administrative culture that is aspired. When summarizing findings of more than ten independent evaluations of public management reforms in Switzerland, Rieder and Lehmann (2002) found that NPM reforms lead to a significant change in administrative culture described by values, such as cost consciousness, results orientation, and entrepreneurial behavior. Others argue, however, that there exists a specific public service culture which shows imperviousness to change (Osborne & Brown, 2005).

COMPARISON OF APPROACHES

The discussion in the previous sections presented varying approaches to study culture and cultural elements in the context of organizational analysis. The overview is not complete and could not account for each approach in detail, but highlights variations and different assumptions concerning the role and inclusion of culture. Characteristics of the approaches are summarized in Table 2.

As regards the definition and conceptualization of culture, the wide scope of meaning in its anthropological origins is continued also in its application to organizational contexts. It showed that early studies restricted cultural aspects to attitudes and values, but that gradually more complex definitions came into use in organizational analysis. The term culture is used in organizational analysis to address cultural aspects on various levels, ranging from national cultures to organizational subcultures. Further, it is to be noted that not all approaches work with clear and precise conceptualizations. While some carefully transmit the concept from its anthropological context to organizations, there is a tendency to use the term culture as a residual. Most importantly, the understanding of culture in corporate culture context is materially distinct from that in other social science disciplines.

	Sociocultural theories	Culturalist theories	Institutionalist theories			Functionalist theories
			Historical	Sociological	Rational Choice	
<i>Definition of culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as set of attitudes • C. is studied as values and attitudes of individuals • C. basically stable, flexible in the long-term • Prominent conceptualizations: "political c.", "civic c." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anthropological understanding and definition of c. • C. defined in relation to relevant social system • Emphasis on cognitive scripts, unconscious processes, role of symbols, etc. • Broad and complex concepts, precise conceptualizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as characteristic of context and organization • Often no precise definition of culture • C. as history, identities, beliefs, routines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. is an institution • C. as norms, routines, rules and cognitive scripts, symbol systems, moral framing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as a product of primordial and rational interactions • C. not dependent on individual attitudes • Various cultural identifications to choose from • Often no precise definition of culture • Prominent conceptualizations: "first/second face of c." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as beliefs, values, artifacts • Often imprecise definition, residual for the informal and the implicit
<i>Definition of organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization is culture/organization as cultural phenomenon • Broad understanding of organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal and informal organization • Rules and conventions promulgated by formal organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization is a culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal entities • Objects of managerial responsibility
<i>Linkage between culture and organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as independent variable for the outcome of organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought is linked to action • C. creates/limits restrictions and possibilities for action and determines how this action is understood by its members • Organizations are cultural constructs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as interdependent variable • Organization shapes identities, beliefs, routines • C. as context, influences organization via path-dependency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly interactive and mutually constitutive relation organization - culture • Organizations affect normative and cognitive dimension of individuals • Organizational practices are culture specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. as independent variable • C. serves as context dependent resource-pool • Organization as rationally functioning body based on given cultural resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. often as internal variable, sometimes also as external variable • C. as success-factor for institutional performance

<p><i>Implication for organizational and public management analysis</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualist approach • Organization needs to be congruent with c. • Reform and change will happen within cultural structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations are reproductions of culture systems, not functionalist instruments or structures • Organizations can not be constructed, they are accomplished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change and development of organizations are historical processes • Reform strategies in different institutions will lead to different outcomes (path-dependency) • Culture, as one of many causal factors, determines structural possibilities of reform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational practice and reform enhances social legitimacy (and not rationality) • Reforms are not case-wise independent • Reforms and change developments are driven by imitation of reference groups and normative pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational development • Political elites instrumentalize cultural resources to mobilize masses to influence reform outcomes • Different reform outcomes in different cultural contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of culture as field of management • "Visions" of appropriate and aspired culture • Culture as enabler/limiter of organizational development
<p><i>Research interest</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination of various "types" of c. and their underlying attitudes • Fit between organizational forms and culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revelation, "deciphering" and interpretation of social action, events, structures • Development of analytical concepts to understand, to be understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-national variations of institutional framing to new challenges • Typologies which classify and explain patterns and trends • Emphasis on unintended effects of institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of why institutions adopt specific forms, procedures, rules, symbols, values, etc. • Exploration of how practices are diffused cross-organizationally and internationally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination of "cultural rationality" by deciphering cultural preferences and applying cost-benefit considerations to given context • Researching intra-/intercultural factors affecting acceptance of/resistance to political change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management techniques and contingencies to influence and shape culture • Link of cultural characteristics and management performance

Table 2. Overview of Definitions and Conceptualizations of Culture.

Theoretical discussion uses various kinds of modeling the link between cultural aspects and organization. From being incorporated as unilateral causal relationship in contextualist studies, the array ranges over interdependent modeling structures to another extreme, which has been referred to as culture as metaphor (not as variable) (Meadows, 1967; Smircich, 1983). While culture and organization are often treated as two separate objects of investigation which are somehow linked, the latter approach considers culture and organization to be identical and therefore the same object of investigation.

These different stances on the character and link of culture lead to varying results and implications for organizational and management practice. Approaches tend to focus on certain explanations of organizational practices and assign different effects and influences to culture. For example, while historical institutionalism emphasizes variations in reform implementation on an international scale, sociological institutionalism seeks to explain why similar organizational practices disseminate internationally. In both approaches culture is used for argumentations, yet in different notions.

In sum, the conception of culture and organization seems to be linked to the topic or phenomenon researchers are interested in. Smircich (1983) argues that the interlinkage between culture and organization manifests in several topical content areas that interest organization and management scholars. Such areas are: comparative/cross-cultural management, corporate culture, organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organization. Notably, in each content area different conceptions of culture and organization underlie research.

THE EXPLICIT USE OF SOCIETAL CULTURE IN PUBLIC MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

As mentioned before, culture became a common term in management studies in general, and accordingly is also well represented in public management literature. The vast majority of publication, though, uses a functionalist view of culture which does not deepen our understanding of the interplay between societal culture and public management arrangements. Others like Kelman (2005) focus their research on change in public administration, but don't even use the term "culture". In this section, we will explore the explicit application of the culture concept in public management literature in reference to the overview of approaches given above. We will thereby focus on two classics of the current public management debate that can be considered as prominent and influential contributions which explicitly address the topic of culture and public management: Hood's (1998) *The art of the state*, and Pollitt's and Bouckaert's (2004) *Public Management Reform - A comparative analysis*.

In *The art of the state*, Hood applies the grid-group cultural theory of anthropologist Douglas (1982) to public management research, often referring to Thompson *et al* (Thompson *et al*, 1990). By using this basic methodology and analytical framework he uncovers what he views as basic recurring patterns that form the wide variety of crazy-quilt recipes now apparent in government organizations and management literature. He derives four fundamental world-views ("ways of life"): the hierarchist, the individualist, the egalitarian, and the fatalist way. Hood concludes that cultural theory can help to

advance further than conventional analysis of rhetoric by differentiating the major rhetorical families, especially relating to issues of managerial modernization and global convergence. Reflecting on the application of this theoretical framework he argues that intellectual analysis and arguments point more in favor of divergence and diversity than advocates of modernization and globalization like to believe. The cultural theory approach is seen to be helpful as framing approach for thinking creatively about available forms of organization and in exploring a variety of what-to-do ideas that surround public services and government (Hood, 1998), or in Hood's terms:

Cultural theory helps us to understand why there is no generally agreed answer to the question 'who should manage whom and how' in government ... cultural theory can provide a basis for analysing the variety of ways that control can work in, over and by public service organization. And it can help us to explore the variety of rhetorics - persuasive stories and analogies linked with 'recipes' - which are applicable to public management, by identifying the sorts of stories and metaphors that go with each organizational world-view. (p 223)

Thus, Hood's definition of culture is not clearly focused either on societal or on organizational culture. Implicitly, Hood seems to follow a concept of organizational culture as he analyzes "organizational world-view". In many parts of his book, however, he refers to history and collective storytelling in different countries which have an impact on the cultural bias in public management. Sociocultural theories seem to have had some relevance for Hood's thinking, and it could also be argued that he is walking in the path of historical and sociological institutionalism. As he mentions in his book:

... the understanding of cultural and organizational variety, within an historical perspective deserves a central place in the analysis of public management. (p. 225)

Although there is a smart way to look at culture through the lens of cultural analysis such as proposed by Hood, it remains widely unclear how exactly the move "down-grid / down-group" should happen, and what public managers can do to make this step with their organizations. Insofar, Hood's book does not take the reader further than his article that used cultural theory to explain criticisms against NPM (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994).

Pollitt's and Bouckaert's (2004) comparative analysis in *Public Management Reform* develops explicit models and taxonomies which classify and explain specific patterns and trends. The authors draw attention to cross-national variation in reform processes. Reforms in different countries are discussed at the background of a taxonomy of regime types by a fivefold classification for elements of politico-administrative regimes including form of state and government, majoritarian versus consensus type executive governments, relationships between ministers and top level bureaucrats, administrative culture, and channels of policy advice. Those structures of the political and administrative systems are depicted to enclose and surround the more specific and dynamic processes of reforms. The authors describe their theoretical approach as "[...] probably closer to a mildly constructivist historical institutionalism than to either rational choice or the more strongly constructivist sociological institutionalism" (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Barzelay and Gallego (2006) have also located Pollitt's and Bouckaert's study well within historical institutionalism.

In this study, culture comes into play, first, in their taxonomy of politico-administrative regimes, one dimension which is charting the administrative culture, whereby administrative culture of *Rechtsstaat* and *public interest* are defining the continuum. By this continuum, administrative culture represents patterns of behavior and value systems. *Rechtsstaat* cultures - based on Roman Law traditions - are characterized by legality, conformity with rules as well as a distinct identity of public servants as representatives of the state as sovereign, even superior, authority. On the contrary, in public interest cultures with common law traditions, public servants are considered to serve the government and get the legitimacy of their existence in a more functionalist way. Secondly, the authors describe their "picture" of the interrelation of public management reforms and the cultural environment using the framework of levels of governance by Lynn and colleagues (Lynn *et al*, 2001). "At the 'top' is the global and national cultural environment. This tends to form a set of pervasive influences rather than being an explicit target of reform" (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004) .

Typically for a historical institutionalist approach, culture is treated as (one among others) context variable having influence on the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals. As context variable it has substantial influence on the organizational processes and explains varying reform outcomes. Turning to the definition and conceptualization of culture, the explanations are rather short, often implicit, and where explicit, rely on a two-folded continuum. Even though this study became a very prominent reference for cultural aspects in public management reforms, it must be noted that - as many historical institutional analyses - it actually uses a very simple and limited definition of culture - which, however, is at anytime clear to the reader and is adequate for the line of argument.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

During the past several years, public management reform literature has increasingly become culture-aware. While early contributions on New Public Management reforms often focused on the ideological, doctrinal, and instrumental aspects and sought to learn from best-practice abroad (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Naschold, 1996), the role of culture and its impact on reform agendas as well as outcomes is increasingly being considered. To stress sensibility to contextual and cultural factors, Reichard (2001) warns against "naïve concept transfers" when concepts from one country are sought to be copied in another country without considering the specific circumstances. To date, discussion and literature on public management includes cultural aspects in various dimensions and stemming from different theoretical approaches. In general, the historical institutionalist stance, sociocultural approaches, and corporate culture accounts appear most common and describe the underlying assumptions in much of the discussion.

Considering the overview of theoretical approaches given in this article, some ideas for the further development of the discussion can be derived. Following Smircich's (1983) argument that the thematic interest or topic is linked to the conceptualization of organization and culture, it could be concluded that the wider dissemination of certain approaches is corresponding to a thematic focus on cross-country, comparative studies and change management issues of the current debate. For the future, this points to a wider consideration of other thematic fields which are covered by approaches less

prominent so far in public management research. So, the exploration of cognitive and symbolic systems and the development of “deciphering codes” could be one example of such a field of interest. Related to this, this could lead to an exploration of such cultural elements as language or religion and their influence and meaning for the sense-making and patterns of organizations in societies.

As the overview of theoretical approaches showed, cultural arguments are used to argue for various aspects and are drawn on to explain different, sometimes opposed behavior and varying developments. Therefore, it is important to be transparent and aware of the approach that is applied, because the approach chosen influences the consequences that culture is claimed to have.

The concept of “culture” aims at grouping actors in societies and organizations according to mutual values, beliefs, cognitive and epistemic processes, and ultimately similar behavior. By labeling these groups, researchers try to get access to the informal and subjective world of organizations. For public management research, creating more knowledge about the way to approach culture as a social phenomenon is fundamental, especially for an international scholarship. Consequently, future research could and should put more emphasis on the cultural context and its detailed understanding - preferably in a heuristic process - rather than the formalized institutions.

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ISSN	ISSN 1662-1387