

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Between patronage and good governance: organizational arrangements in (local) public appointment processes

### Journal Item

#### How to cite:

Sancino, Alessandro; Grossi, Giuseppe and Sicilia, Mariafrancesca (2018). Between patronage and good governance: organizational arrangements in (local) public appointment processes. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 84(4) pp. 785–802.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2016 The Authors



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:  
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1177/0020852316675944>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

# **Between patronage and good governance: organizational arrangements in (local) public appointment processes**

## **Abstract**

This paper investigates whether certain organizational arrangements in (local) public appointment processes could encourage the use of appointments as a tool of good governance rather than as a tool of patronage. Specifically, we studied the role of six organizational arrangements in ten case studies of intra- and inter-organizational public appointment processes held in Italian local government. We found that good governance (in terms of perception of overall integrity and fairness) was found in processes of public appointments where there was independent scrutiny, and when the process involved local councillors and/or external stakeholders — that is, actors beyond those with the formal power to appoint. In these cases, making appointments was seen as a tool of good governance rather than of patronage. These organizational arrangements were more relevant than other ones such as transparency of public advertisements, job descriptions and educational/professional requirements, media and public awareness. The paper describes the relevant literature, the research study and discusses implications for research, policy and management.

## **Points for practitioners**

In terms of policy implications, the article discusses the importance of ensuring transparency and some form of checks and balances in the power of making public appointments as well as of promoting more awareness among citizens and the society in general on the issue of public appointments. From a managerial point of view, the article suggests that public managers should consider the implications of the different organizational arrangements that can be used in public appointment processes to exploit the good governance potential of public appointments.

## **Keywords**

Public appointments, local government, public managers, politicians, good governance, public governance, patronage, Italy, corruption

## Introduction

This article focuses on the use of public appointments in Italian local government organizations—specifically analysing the role of different organizational arrangements that have been used in intra- and inter-organizational processes.

Several recent phenomena have increased the relevance of public appointments. For example, some reforms inspired by New Public Management and New Public Governance (Carboni, 2010; Klijn, 2012; Meneguzzo et al., 2013) resulted at the local level in the growth of municipal corporations (Grossi and Reichard, 2008), of the so-called quangos (Van Thiel, 2001; Payne and Skelcher, 1997) and/or of public agencies (Verhoest et al., 2012) and more generally in the creation of many hybrid organizations (Skelcher et al., 2013; Grossi and Thomasson, 2015; Denis et al., 2015).

This trend has been labelled variously, such as the 'hollowing out of the state' (Rhodes, 1994), 'the appointed state' (Skelcher, 1998) or 'distributed public governance (e.g., Flinders, 2004; OECD, 2002). Whatever the label, the effect has been that potential places and opportunities for making public appointments have been extended, contributing to what has been described by Vibert (2007) as 'the rise of the unelected'. As Watson (2004: 1) noted, the current situation of the public sector in several countries is that there are many appointed people who manage a huge amount of public money and make decisions that considerably impact citizens' lives.

Given this backdrop, the ways in which public appointments are managed represent an intriguing and relevant issue. Many authors (e.g., Bresler-Gonen, 2007; Dahlström, 2009; Di Mascio, 2012a; Kopecký, 2011; Kopecký et al., 2012;

Mayntz and Derlien, 1989; Scherlis, 2009) have approached the topic of public appointments from a political science perspective, studying – among other factors – the motivations for making public appointments and/or the behaviours of politicians and parties in making appointments, and focusing mainly on central governments. However, according to Flinders et al. (2012: 511-513), more detailed studies are needed on this topic, especially from a public management and governance perspective<sup>1</sup> (McTavish and Piper, 2007: 146).

In this article, we aim to contribute to closing this gap. Specifically, we follow the work of Flinders et al. (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012), which highlighted some conditions that can allow appointments to be used as a tool of good governance rather than a tool of ‘pork barrel’ politics, *‘which is based on the exploitation of government funds to garner support in specific electoral constituencies’* (Flinders et al., 2012: 513).

Good governance is a very broad and value-laden concept often used normatively to promote certain actions by governments (Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2003) and/or to mark a distinction from practices of bad governance such as corruption, patronage, lack of transparency, etc. (e.g., United Nations Development Program, 1997). In the literature, it is possible to identify different elements or principles of good governance as far as public appointment processes are concerned. Some of these conditions refer to variables such as the form of the state, the ethics of politicians and the nature of power in society (e.g., focused, diffused or open) but they are outside the domain of this study. The focus of our analysis is rather the conditions that refer to organizational arrangements that can be put in place by public managers. Such arrangements

include transparency and accountability of public announcements for appointable positions, stakeholder engagement, and checks to detect and punish corrupt behaviours (e.g., Matheson et al., 2007). Our research question is the following: 'What are the organizational arrangements in the process of local public appointments that can foster the use of public appointments as a tool of good governance?'

The relevance of our contribution has three aspects: The first is that our study is focused on a country (Italy) with a strong tradition of patronage and clientelism (Di Mascio, 2014; Kickert, 2011; Kopecký et al., 2012), similar to some other European countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain. The second is the approach and the nature of our research. We looked at the issue of public appointments through the lens of public management and governance. For this purpose, we analysed the organizational arrangements of public appointment processes. The third aspect of our contribution is that most of the empirical studies so far conducted on the topic of public appointments have focused on central government (e.g., Van Thiel, 2009; Carboni, 2010), whereas our study focuses on the local government level, explicitly recognizing the existence of intra- and inter-organizational appointments.

The article has this logical structure: in the next section, we briefly present a theoretical backdrop about appointments in the public sector, and this is followed by a section that develops our theoretical framework of analysis. The next two sections present the research strategy, methods and context; the final two sections present and discuss findings and conclusions.

## **Appointments in the public sector**

The capacity of political actors to appoint people to positions in public and semi-public (e.g., hybrid) organizations has been labelled in the literature as patronage and/or public appointments. Sometimes these two words are used as synonyms; at other times, they are assigned different meanings. Indeed, the word 'patronage' has been mostly used with a negative valence to refer to cases in which appointments by politicians are negative, unproductive and unable to improve personnel management (e.g., Mosher, 1982; Van Riper, 1958). Many studies have contributed to creating this negative image of patronage in the public sector, relating it to corruption, cronyism and nepotism. For example, Caiden (1991: 490) depicted patronage as a common 'bureaupathology' – that is, '*the vices, maladies and sickness of bureaucracy*'. Roback and Vinzant (1994: 501) pointed out that '*patronage is associated with staffing policies that result in marginally qualified people, waste and corruption*'. From this perspective, appointments are seen as a bad governance tool that politicians use merely to gain support and consensus in specific electoral constituencies (Müller, 2006; Manzetti and Wilson, 2007; Kopecký et al., 2012).

However, more recently, some scholars have proposed a re-examination of the concept and moved away from the idea that patronage is a '*pathological legacy of the past requiring condemnation and elimination*' (e.g., Bearfield, 2009: 73).

In other words, making appointments is not necessarily an evil, but could instead be a tool of good governance. For example, appointments may create more alignment between political and administrative structures (e.g., Aberbach

and Rockman, 1998), contribute to energizing the civil service structure (Peters and Pierre, 2004: 11), allow for attracting talents and broadening governing knowledge (Flinders, 2012). They could also offer possibilities for appointing people who reflect societal characteristics (e.g., Flinders et al., 2012; Naff, 2001; Van der Walt and Ingley, 2003), or involve sections of the community with little interest in conventional adversarial party politics, but with interest in undertaking a less partisan role in public life (Flinders et al., 2011).

One underlying assumption of the literature is that appointments are more difficult for politicians to use for promoting personal or party goals, whatever they are (Matheson et al., 2007), when their powers to appoint an individual for a given position is constrained. On this issue, referring more broadly to personnel policy decisions, Meyer-Sahling (2006: 699-700) argued that the degree of political discretion<sup>2</sup> might be constrained through two main actions: (1) defining *'standards and formal procedures a minister or any other authorized set of actors has to follow before taking a personnel policy decision'* (Meyer-Sahling, 2006: 699) and (2) assigning decision-making authority to different members of the government and/or set of administrative actors instead of attributing this power to a single member of the government (see also Matheson et al., 2007: 30).

In the next section, we develop a framework for analysing public appointment processes.

## **Public appointment processes: in search of a framework of analysis**



As we have outlined, appointments can be potentially seen and used as a tool of good governance or as a tool of patronage. The position of the pendulum between the two extremes may also depend on procedural constraints in the process of public appointments; these constraints may be established through several organizational arrangements. In particular, the more such organizational arrangements are able to constrain political discretion, the more appointments are likely to realize the potential benefits that they are expected to offer. In this respect, as highlighted by Meyer-Sahling (2006), two main aspects should be considered: (1) the existence of standards and procedures and (2) the actor(s) who is (are) in charge of making public appointments.

As far as standards and procedures are concerned, our critical analysis of the literature reveals three key elements as crucial: (i) transparency of the process (Edwards, 2006: 4; Flinders, 2009: 551, 557), (ii) media and public awareness (Flinders et al. 2010; 2012) and (iii) job descriptions with professional requirements (Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, OCPA, 2005: 20).

Transparency of the process and media and public awareness are both connected with the concept of openness. Transparency is one of the main ideas that have informed the practices aimed at innovating public administration (Hood, 1991). Transparency per se is considered an intrinsic value in public affairs (Hood, 2006; Lapsley, 2008) that allows for improving administrative as well as policy effectiveness (Ball, 2009). In the literature, however, transparency is interpreted in multiple ways. In the context of recruitment decisions, transparency refers to the fact that vacancies are openly advertised, potentially stimulating

applications from a wider group of people than just the personal connections of politicians in charge of making the appointment. This may also result in a constrained political discretion of the patron due to the higher number of people who might scrutinize the decision.

Media and public awareness concern the provision of information to the general public on appointments in the public sector. If governments are obliged to provide information to media or other stakeholders concerning their appointments, they are expected to garner more external pressure and be more careful about their decisions. In this perspective, media and public awareness are seen as ways to constrain political discretion (e.g., Keane, 2011). Another factor that can constrain political discretion in public appointments is the presence of a job description with educational and/or professional requirements. Some authors stressed that the narrow definition of relevant skills and experience can lead to unintended and perverse outcomes (Gatenby Sanderson, 2009; Flinders et al., 2012). However, a general agreement seems to exist on the relevance of having a job description with educational and/or professional requirements for identifying the person for any position, thus recognizing the principle of merit<sup>3</sup> in public appointments.

Finally, several studies (e.g., Kovac and Virant, 2013) also emphasized the importance of (iv) independent scrutiny led by external experts and/or an independent assessor in the process of public appointments, mainly for shortlisting candidates and/or providing recommendations to politicians before their choice. The independent scrutiny may also help to reduce allegations of corruption and nepotism (Agere, 2000).

The second constraint identified as relevant by Meyer-Sahling (2006) was that, in terms of the power to make appointments, not only the number of political actors involved in the process seems to matter, but also their characteristics. Indeed, according to Amado (2001: 569), extending the authority of public appointments to more than one member of the executive body is not enough to provide oversight and checks in the process. In this respect, Amado pointed out that it is also important (v) to include members of the legislative body in the process of public appointments. Their involvement is considered a way to place *'the process on the public agenda, providing opponents an opportunity to voice their concerns'* (2001: 580).

Finally, Borgonovi (2002: 369) also mentioned the opportunity (vi) to involve other external actors in the public appointment process (e.g., local associations, universities, etc.) beyond those who belonged to institutionalized and mandated structures within governments. This could be seen as using public appointments as a way to revitalize democratic processes. The importance of stakeholder and citizen participation and involvement in public governance is coherent with the idea that broader and more inclusive processes can enhance, on the one hand, the external legitimacy of the decision making, and on the other hand, the representation of multiple constituents and stakeholders (e.g. Bingham et al., 2005).

Drawing on the six elements described above, we investigated whether the public appointment processes studied provided organizational arrangements for ensuring (i) the transparency of the process, (ii) existence of a job description with specific educational/professional requirements, (iii) media and public

awareness, (iv) existence of independent scrutiny by external experts, (v) involvement of local councillors and/or (vi) local stakeholders in the public appointment process.

## **Research strategy and methods**

We opted for a research strategy based on multiple case studies (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1994) adopting a whole-of-government approach (Christensen and Laegreid 2007) for analysing both intra- and inter-organizational appointments in local government. Specifically, we investigated ten public appointment processes used in Italian local government organizations. This research strategy appeared to be the most appropriate considering the study variables. As a matter of fact, obtaining information about the organizational arrangements of public appointment processes is quite difficult due to the political sensitivity and, often, the secrecy around this topic.

We chose our cases combining three criteria: the accessibility of data, the geographical location and the typology of appointments. With respect to geographical location, we limited our analysis to local government organizations belonging to the same region in the north of Italy to control for contextual differences that are particularly significant in Italy. This region shows a high level of economic performance and medium to high level of social capital as compared to other parts of Italy (Putnam, 1993). More information about our case studies is provided in Table 1, where we omitted the names of the organizations involved in the study in order to preserve their anonymity.

**\*\*Insert Table 1 about here\*\***

Public appointment processes were analysed in local government organizations of different sizes to reflect a variety of complexities. Moreover, we investigated five appointments within the local government for their different roles (city manager, auditors (3), ombudsman) and five inter-organizational appointments of board members in different types of local public organizations (municipal corporations and local foundations) operating in different industries (culture, energy management, transportation and infrastructure).

Data were gathered and analysed from several sources: official documents of public organizations with the power to appoint and local public entities subjected to appointing powers. Furthermore, at least three informal and conversational semi-structured interviews were conducted in each case study, for a total of 39 people interviewed (see Table 1 for further details of the type of actors interviewed); interviewees were not informed about the specific contents and aims of the study in order to avoid mimetic behaviour and stereotyped responses and they were identified by combining initial theoretical sampling with snowball sampling according to the emerging findings. Interviews were not audio-recorded, but interview notes were written up and analysed within a few days; when verbatim quotes are reported in the next section, they were chosen after consultation with the authors for their relevance and representativeness.

## **Research context**

In Italian local government, the appointing power is usually centralized in the hands of mayors. However, as noted earlier, some organizational arrangements in the public appointment process can be put in place to include other actors. Italian local government has been labelled as a clientelistic/patronage model of a local government system (Goldsmith, 1992: 395) and is thus assumed to be more inclined to party colonization (Di Mascio, 2012b; Müller 2006). Moreover, Italy is distanced from countries like the UK (Sancino, 2011) that have established a commissioner for public appointments (e.g., Denton, 2006) or have tried to regulate in a formal way the aspects embedded in the public appointment process.

Over the last few decades, the phenomenon of public appointments in Italy has increased in relevance considerably both at an intra- and inter-organizational level (e.g., Di Mascio, 2012b). The latest survey conducted by the Treasury found that Italian local governments altogether have about 29,000 shareholdings in about 6,500 local public entities (with different legal forms and ownership structures) (Dipartimento del Tesoro, 2013). Some 65% of municipal corporations are established in private legal forms (limited companies or joint-stock companies) and 35% in other legal forms (Corte dei Conti, 2012). About 30% of municipal corporations are in mixed public and private ownership (IRPA, 2012). More generally, we estimate that at least 40,000 people (with different roles) have been appointed to local public entities or in some internal organizational role (Unioncamere, 2008).

Even in comparative terms, the relevance of appointments in Italy is confirmed: Kopecký et al. (2012), reported the results of a research project on

practices of public appointments in 15 European countries at the central government level. They observed that the scale and depth of the phenomenon varied widely across countries, with seven countries below the mean for Europe as a whole (Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and UK) and eight countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Spain) at or slightly above the average value for Europe.

Contextualizing the study of appointments in the public sector, however, is very important. In this perspective, one of the main differences between northern and southern Europe lies in the role of politicians as masters of appointed officials; one important difference between Italy and other countries, especially in northern Europe, is indeed the impossibility in Italy to appoint politicians to boards or managerial roles in municipal corporations. Finally, a study from the OECD (Matheson et al., 2007) on formal and informal restrictions and external oversight for political involvement in appointments (senior staffing in the study) has placed Italy as a country characterized by the presence of mainly formal types of restrictions and external oversight. This situation differs again from other countries such as Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon ones where informal restrictions and informal external oversight also play a relevant role.

## **Findings**

The first variable of analysis we investigated was the transparency of the appointment process itself; specifically, we operationalized transparency through investigating whether or not a public advertisement had been posted. We noted that public advertisements for the positions to be filled were guaranteed in seven

out of ten cases. This result confirmed that, in the remaining three cases, the literature on covert politics and hidden public appointment processes touched the reality of our empirical context. As an interviewee said: '*A public advertisement is placed only if it is expected by the law*' (interview M5). This seems to confirm the legalist approach of Italian public administration, where behaviours are generally guided by the idea of conforming to the law.

Looking more analytically into the case studies, we found that the three cases for which the public advertisement was not posted were all inter-organizational appointments. This could depend on the fact that the local public entities (such as, for example, local quangos, foundations and/or municipal corporations) are not always required by administrative law to make public advertisements; however, this result seems to confirm that further accountability mechanisms should be provided and used in inter-organizational settings (e.g., Almqvist et al. 2013). This could avoid some risks such as diminishing publicness of public services (Haque 2001) and of democratic uncoupling (Klijn and Skelcher 2007); it might also allow for the identification of the boundaries and the different dimensions of public accountability (Luke 2010).

As for the job description of the position to be filled by public appointment, we investigated whether there were specific educational background/training and/or some professional requirements to be satisfied for an applicant to be eligible for the appointment. In seven case studies, we found that there were such requirements, but in three of those seven cases we did not find any detailed job description with some measurable criteria to be satisfied (which is why in Table 2 we put an ('x') in the row); specifically, in these cases the criteria were generic,



leaving space for any kind of interpretation and making impossible any clear and objective comparison among the job candidates (*'The problem is that the criteria are neither clearly stated nor possibly operationalized and measured in advance, so all can be very discretionary'*, interview P6a).

In three of the four other case studies with job descriptions (all the intra-organizational appointments for the auditor role – *Nucleo di Valutazione*), a degree with some training in management was required (thus, not necessarily in management, but with some modules/exams within it that were related to management). In the remaining case (ombudsman) candidates eligible for the appointments were required to have a degree in administrative or public law.

According to those interviewed, the request in the latter case for a specific qualification made a significant difference in preventing the abuse of power by politicians by more clearly targeting the professional community (in this case, lawyers and/or experts in law) to which the position referred. This did not happen in the other three cases where, as confirmed by one mayor interviewed (P2a), *'professional and educational requirements [university training in management] were included for addressing a bureaucratic fulfilment and for giving a stronger legitimacy to the appointment, but I already knew who I wanted to appoint before starting the process'*. In this respect, a public manager interviewed said, *'It doesn't make any sense spending time writing a public advertisement if you cannot do a specific job description to attract the best candidates because you actually know that position has to be used by your mayor to reward someone from his personal constituencies'* (M3). This statement clearly pointed to the use of appointments

as a tool of organizational and/or party patronage (Kopecký et al., 2012) with the effect of producing a negative perception of the overall fairness of the process.

As far as the media and public awareness are concerned, we found that media reported news about the public appointments in question in daily newspapers, websites and/or in TV programmes in four case studies. However, this did not happen for a proactive role of public managers in targeting the public advertisement, but rather because there was high media attention to those (appointable) positions in relation to their remuneration. Moreover, other interviewees drew our attention to another important aspect: *'A lot of the people working in our municipalities [e.g., councillors, employees, managers] and a lot of citizens don't know what positions are eligible for public appointments'* (M2).

With regard to our fourth variable of analysis (independent scrutiny), we investigated whether or not external actors beyond those with the power to appoint were involved in the selection of the candidates; this was the case in four out of the ten case studies.

#### INSERT ABOUT HERE TABLE 2

More specifically, we observed that in cases 2 and 10, an external panel of experts was ad hoc appointed for shortlisting the candidates. The task of the external panel was to screen all of the candidates and identify a shortlist of eligible candidates. Afterwards, the mayors were free to choose from among them.

In case 3, there was a panel (independent appointing committee) made up of experts elected by the local council. That panel was in charge for a term of three

years with the task of selecting and shortlisting candidates for all of the eligible inter-organizational appointments. This solution seemed particularly interesting because it also outlined the possibility, in the context of Italian local government, of creating new organizational bodies within the municipality with the specific task to oversee, in this case, all of the inter-organizational public appointments.

Finally, in case 9, the independent scrutiny was conducted by the city council, which promoted several hearings for interviewing candidates: after all the hearings, every city councillor voted for their preferred candidate, resulting in the candidate with the most votes being appointed by the mayor.

As far as the involvement of councillors and/or external local stakeholders in the public appointment processes investigated, our findings show that local councillors were involved in two cases, whereas external stakeholders were involved only in case 3. In this respect, it is interesting to note an internal relation in our findings: local councillors and external stakeholders were involved in public appointment processes when an independent scrutiny of the candidates by experts was also provided.

The last line of Table 2 indicates the perceived outcomes of the processes of public appointment investigated. We coded the perceived outcomes after analysis of all the qualitative data and after consultation among all the researchers to determine which of three possible options had been applied: patronage, good governance or mixed.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that, according to our data, processes of public appointments where there was independent scrutiny were not perceived as patronage. In particular, two of them were perceived as good governance and

the other two as mixed (some elements of good governance and some of patronage). Good governance (in terms of perception of the overall integrity and fairness of the process of public appointment among the main actors) was found in processes of public appointments with independent scrutiny, but also when local councillors and local stakeholders were engaged in the processes.

## **Conclusions**

Public appointments are very much part of the present and future (Bearfield 2009: 73) of public administration. Their democratic relevance can be easily understood on consideration of how much public money may be managed in some cases by appointed personnel.

The attention that several countries such as the UK, Canada and New Zealand (Edwards 2006:1) have given to ensuring openness, competitiveness and transparency in public appointment processes demonstrates the sensitivity of this matter. There may thus be important implications in terms of the integrity of the public governance processes and citizens' trust in public institutions.

The literature has usually associated appointments in the public sector with negative phenomena (e.g., corruption and nepotism); however, more recently, some scholars have recognized the potential of appointments, for example, in involving new people in public organizations and/or attracting talents. This does not mean that politicians should not be able to make decisions that exercise their powers of appointment (Flinders and Matthews, 2010: 651), but that some organizational arrangements can help to use public appointments as a tool of good governance rather than as a tool of patronage.

In this paper, we analysed several intra- and inter-organizational public appointment processes in the context of Italian local government, investigating what organizational arrangements have been employed and what their effect has been on the overall public appointment process in terms of perceptions of the actors involved. We found that the involvement of other actors (local councillors and stakeholders) in the public appointment process beyond those with the power to appoint (the mayor) and the presence of independent scrutiny seem to be more relevant than other organizational arrangements in helping to perceive the use of appointments as a tool of good governance. In other words, transparency of public advertisements, job descriptions and specific educational and/or professional requirements and media and public awareness seem to be not enough in terms of perceptions of integrity and fairness of the process unless accompanied by independent scrutiny and the engagement of other actors beyond those with the power to appoint.

While these findings clearly need to be further explored, some implications of this study can be discussed from policy, managerial and research perspectives. In terms of policy implications, our study confirms the importance of putting public appointments more clearly on the public agenda and of ensuring transparency of all of the eligible positions (for example, the fact that inter-organizational appointments in three case studies were made with any forms of transparency should be seriously considered by policy makers). However, the study also indicates that in contexts such as Italy, characterized by a permeated legalist approach and a high risk for party permeation and corruption (Youngblood Coleman 2014), rather than with standards and procedures, the good

governance potential of public appointments might be better addressed otherwise — that is, through organizational incentives aimed at providing independent scrutiny and at involving actors other than politicians in the public appointment process.

In terms of managerial implications, the study sheds light on the fact that, in dealing with public appointment processes, public managers should expand their responsibilities and tasks and be asked to perform new public governance roles (Osborne 2006), for example:

- by providing new mechanisms and dimensions of accountability related to the specific characteristics of the inter-organizational and networked context in which local governments operate (e.g., Almquist et al. 2013);
- by developing more advanced techniques of human resource management for using appointments as a way of attracting talents or for re-engaging sections of the community towards public matters;
- by managing relationships with media and external stakeholders in order to promote public awareness and more inclusive public appointment processes.

In terms of research implications, our aim in this article has been to increase knowledge on the issue of public appointments, adopting a public management and governance perspective as suggested by McTavish and Piper (2007). In this respect, even if it is clear that the research around public appointments should be interdisciplinary, our paper demonstrated that studying organizational arrangements in public appointment processes through public management and governance lenses is possible and even needed.

The main limitations of our research consisted in the limited number of case studies investigated and in the exploratory nature of the study; however, coherent with case study research, we were not interested in statistical generalization, but in investigating relations between the use of some organizational arrangements and the perceived outcomes of appointment processes.

Finally, we believe that public management and governance research in the current era cannot neglect the relevance of public appointment processes in terms of their democratic implications. Researchers should therefore continue to study the role of public managers and identify which organizational arrangements can exploit the good governance potential of public appointments and prevent the abuse of power by politicians. In this perspective, future studies may provide further and more refined frameworks of analysis and apply them across different contexts.

## Notes

1 McTavish and Piper (2007: 146) warned explicitly about the lack of public management studies on public appointments: *'the system for monitoring, regulating and reporting on the way in which appointments in public organizations are made is a relatively neglected area of public management'*.

2. Political discretion has been defined by Meyer-Sahling (2006: 699-700) as *'the extent to which the government of the day, or its ministers, has the possibility to exercise personnel policy authority and the extent to which the exercise of this authority is subject to specific procedural constraints'*.

3 Merit is defined in different ways depending on the context in which it is being used. With specific reference to hiring decisions, merit implies that officials are selecting on the basis of qualifications, competences and abilities for the position (Weber, 1968).



## References

- Aberbach JD and Rockman BA (1988) Mandates or Mandarins? Control and Discretion in the Modern Administrative State. *Public Administration Review* 48(2): 606–612.
- Agere S (2000) *Promoting Good Governance: Principles, Practices and Perspectives*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Almquist R, Grossi G, Jan van Helden G and Reichard C (2013) Public Sector Governance and Accountability. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 24(7-8): 479-628.
- Amado R (2001) Checks, Balances, and Appointments in the Public Service: Israeli Experience in Comparative Perspective. *Public Administration Review* 61 (5): 569-584.
- Ball C (2009) What is transparency? *Public Integrity* 11(4): 293-308.
- Bearfield D. (2009) What is Patronage? A Critical Reexamination. *Public Administration Review* 69(1): 64-76.
- Bingham L, Nabatchi T and O’Leary R (2005) The New Governance: Practices and Process for Stakeholder and Citizen Participation in the Work of Government. *Public Administration Review* 65 (5): 547.
- Borgonovi E (2002) Politici e dirigenti: un rapporto da fiducia da costruire. *Azienda Pubblica* 15(4-5): 367-370.
- Bouckaert G and Van de Walle S (2003) Comparing measures of citizen trust and user satisfaction as indicators of ‘good governance’: Difficulties in linking trust and satisfaction indicators. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 69(3): 329-344.

Bresler-Gonen R (2007) *Political Appointments in Israeli Local Government*. Tel Aviv: The Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy, Tel Aviv University.

Caiden GE (1991) What Really Is Public Maladministration? *Public Administration Review* 51(6): 486-93.

Carboni N (2010) Professional Autonomy vs. Political Control: How to Deal with the Dilemma: Some Evidence from the Italian Core Executive. *Public Policy and Administration* 25(4): 365-386.

Christensen T and Laegreid P (2007) The Whole-of-Government Approach to Public Sector Reform. *Public Administration Review* 67(6): 1059–66.

Corte dei Conti (2012) Rapporto 2012 sul coordinamento della Finanza Pubblica. Available from: <http://www.corteconti.it>

Dahlström C (2009) *Political Appointments in 18 Democracies, 1975–2007*. Gothenburg: QoG Working Paper Series, 18.

Denis J-L Ferlie E and Van Gestel N (2015) Understanding Hybridity in Public Organizations. *Public Administration*, DOI: 10.1111/padm.12175

Denton M (2006) The Impact of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on Delegated Governance: The Commissioner for Public Appointments. *Parliamentary Affairs* 59(3): 491-508.

Di Mascio F (2012a) Changing political parties, persistent patronage: The Italian case in comparative perspective. *Comparative European Politics* 10: 377-398.

Di Mascio F (2012b) *Partiti e Stato in Italia. Le nomine pubbliche tra clientelismo e spoils system*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Di Mascio F (2014) Exploring the link between patronage and party institutionalization: an historical-institutional analysis of the Italian transition. *Democratization* 21(4): 678-698.

Dipartimento del Tesoro (2013) *Rapporto sulle partecipazioni detenute dalle amministrazioni pubbliche al 31 Dicembre 2011*. Roma: Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze.

Edwards M (2006) *Appointments to Public Sector Boards in Australia: A comparative assessment*. Canberra: Issues Paper Series no. 3, Corporate Governance ARC Project, University of Canberra.

Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532-550.

Flinders M (2004) Distributed public governance in Britain. *Public Administration* 82(4): 883-909.

Flinders M (2009) The Politics of Patronage in the United Kingdom: Shrinking Reach and Diluted Permeation. *Governance* 22(4): 547-570.

Flinders M and Matthews F (2010) Think again: patronage, governance and the smarter state. *Policy & Politics* 38(4): 639-656.

Flinders M Matthews F and Eason C (2011) Are Public Bodies Still 'Male, Pale and Stale'? Examining Diversity in UK Public Appointments 1997-2010. *Politics* 31(3): 129-139.

Flinders M (2012) Heaven's Talent Scouts. Prime Ministerial Power, Ecclesiastical Patronage and the Governance of Britain. *Political Quarterly* 83 (4): 792-805.

Flinders M Matthews F and Eason C (2012) Political Recruitment Beyond Elections: An Exploration of the Link between Patronage, Diversity and Democracy in the UK. *Public Administration* 90(2): 511-528.

GatenbySanderson (2009) *How Broad is Your Board?* London: GatenbySanderson.

Goldsmith (M) (1992) Local Government. *Urban Studies* 29(3/4): 393-410.

Grossi G and Reichard C (2008) Municipal Corporatization in Germany and Italy. *Public Management Review* 10(5): 597-617.

Grossi G. and Thomasson A (2015) Bridging the accountability gap in hybrid organizations: the case of Copenhagen Malmö Port *International Review of Administrative Sciences* DOI:10.1177/0020852314548151

Haque MS (2001) The diminishing publicness of public service under current modes of governance. *Public Administration Review* 61(1), 65–82.

Hood C (1991) A public management for all seasons. *Public Administration* 69 (spring): 3-19.

Hood C (2006) Transparency in Historical Perspective. In: Hood C. and Heald D. (eds.) *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3–23.

IRPA (2012) Il capitalismo municipale, Rapporto 1/2012. Available from: <http://www.astrid-online.it>.

Youngblood Coleman D (2014) *Italy: 2014 Country Review*. Houston: CountryWatch.

- Keane J (2011) Monitory Democracy. In: Alonso S, Keane J and Merkel W (eds) *The Future of Representative Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 212-35.
- Kickert W (2011) Distinctiveness of Administrative Reform in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Common Characteristics of Context, Administrations and Reforms. *Public Administration* 89(3): 801-818.
- Klijn EH (2012) New public management and governance: a comparison. In: Levi-Faur D (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klijn EH and Skelcher C (2007) Democracy and governance networks: compatible or not? Four conjectures and their implications. *Public Administration* 85(3): 1-22.
- Kopecký P (2011) Political Competition and Party Patronage: Public Appointments in Ghana and South Africa. *Political Studies* 59(3): 713-732.
- Kopecký P, Mair P and Spirova M (eds.) (2012) *Party Patronage and Party Government: Public Appointments and Political Control in European Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kovač P and Virant G (2013) Balancing professional standards and political discretion in selecting top officials in Slovenia. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 40: 137-158.
- Lapsley I (2008) The NPM Agenda: Back to the Future. *Financial Accountability & Management* 24(1): 77-96.
- Luke B (2010) Examining Accountability dimensions in State-Owned enterprises. *Financial Accountability & Management* 26(2): 134-162.

- Manzetti L and Wilson CJ (2007) Why Do Corrupt Governments Maintain Public Support? *Comparative Political Studies* 40(8): 949-970.
- Mayntz R and Derlien HD (1989) Party Patronage and Politicization of the West German Administrative Elite 1970-1987: Towards Hybridization. *Governance* 2(4): 384-404.
- McTavish D and Pyper R (2007) Monitoring the Public Appointments Process in the UK. *Public Management Review* 9(1): 145-153.
- Matheson A, Weber B, Manning N and Arnould E (2007) *Study on the Political Involvement in Senior Staffing and on the Delineation of Responsibilities Between Ministers and Senior Civil Servants*. OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, OECD Publishing.
- Meneguzzo M, Sancino A, Guenon M, and Fiorani G (2013) New development: The crisis and European local government reforms. *Public Money & Management*, 33(6): 459-462.
- Meyer-Sahling JH (2006) The Institutionalization of Political Discretion in Post Communist Civil Service Systems: The case of Hungary. *Public Administration* 84(3): 693-715.
- Mosher FC (1982) (eds.) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) *Democracy and the Public Service*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Müller WC (2006) Party Patronage and Colonization of the State. In: Katz RS and Crotty W (eds.) *Handbook of Party Politics*. London: SAGE, 89-195.
- Naff KC (2001) *To Look Like America: Dismantling Barriers for Women and Minorities in Government*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) (2005) Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies, OCPA, August, London, England: <http://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Code-of-Practice-for-Ministerial-Appointments-to-Public-Bodies.pdf>. Accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

OECD (2002) *Distributed Public Governance. Agencies, Authorities, and Other Government Bodies*. Paris: OECD.

Osborne SP (2006) The new public governance? *Public Management Review* 8 (3): 377-87.

Payne T and Skelcher C (1997) Explaining Less Accountability: The Growth of Local Quangos. *Public Administration* 75(2): 207-224.

Peters BG and Pierre J (2004) *Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective. The Quest for Control*. London: Routledge.

Putnam R (1993) *La tradizione civica delle regioni italiane*. Milano: Mondadori.

Rhodes RAW (1994) The Hollowing Out of the State: The Changing Nature of the Public Service in Britain. *Political Quarterly* 65(2): 138-151.

Roback TH and Vinzant JC (1994) The Constitution and the Patronage-Merit Debate: Implications for Personnel Managers. *Public Personnel Management* 23(3): 501-13.

Sancino A (2011) Between democracy and management: local government and the dilemma of spoils system. An analysis of the UK model. *Economia Aziendale Online* 2(3): 303-310.

Scherlis G (2009) Political Appointments and Party Organization: Building Parties as Governmental Networks. Paper prepared for delivery at the 21st IPSA World Congress of Political Science, Santiago, Chile.

Skelcher C. (1998) *The Appointed State: Quasi Governmental Organizations and Democracy*. Buckingham: The Open University Press.

Skelcher C, Sullivan H and Jeffares S (2013) *Hybrid Governance in European Cities. Neighbourhood, Migration and Democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Unioncamere (2008) *Le società partecipate dagli enti locali. Rapporto 2007*. Roma: Retecamere.

United Nations Development Program (1997) Governance and Sustainable Human Development. New York: UNDP (United Nations Development Program).

Van der Walt N and Ingley C (2003) Board Dynamics and the Influence of Professional Background, Gender and Ethic Diversity of Directors. *Corporate Governance: An International Review* 11(3): 218-234.

Van Riper PP (1958) *History of the United States Civil Service*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.

Van Thiel S (2001) *Quangos: trends, causes and consequences*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Van Thiel S (2009) Political influence on public appointments in the Netherlands; the X factor? [Respondents report]. Rotterdam: Erasmus University.

Verhoest K, Van Thiel S, Bouckaert G and Lægreid P (2012) (eds) *Government Agencies: Practices and Lessons from 30 Countries*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



Vibert F (2007) *The Rise of the Unelected: Democracy and the New Separation of Powers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Villems T and van Dorren W (2011) Lost in diffusion? How collaborative arrangements leads to an accountability paradox. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 77(3): 505-530.

Watson E (2004) Public-sector corporate governance: British Columbia's best-practices reforms. *Ivey Business Journal* March/April: 1-8.

Weber M (1968) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.

Yin RK (1999) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. London: Sage.

Youngblood Coleman D (2014) *Italy: 2014 Country Review*. Houston: CountryWatch.

**Table 1. Case studies description**

<b>Process of public appointment</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Intra- vs. inter-organizational appointment</b>	<b>Persons interviewed</b>
1 Board member	Joint-stock company (energy management)	<i>INTER</i>	P = 2; M= 1; E= 1; A= 2
2 City manager	Local government	<i>INTRA</i>	P= 2; M= 1
3 Board member	Joint stock company (energy management)	<i>INTER</i>	P= 3 M= 1
4 Auditor	Local government	<i>INTRA</i>	P= 2; A= 1
5 Auditor	Foundation (cultural management)	<i>INTER</i>	P= 1; A= 1; M= 1
6 Board member	Municipal corporation (transport and infrastructure)	<i>INTER</i>	P= 2; O= 1
7 Board member	Foundation (cultural management)	<i>INTER</i>	P= 1; A= 2
8 Auditor	Local government	<i>INTRA</i>	P= 2; E= 1
9 Ombudsman	Local government	<i>INTRA</i>	P= 4; E= 2; A= 1; M= 1
10 Auditor	Local government	<i>INTRA</i>	P= 1; M= 1; A= 1

Source: AIDA Bureau van Dijk, 2012.

Legend: **P=** politician; **M=** manager; **E=** employee; **A=** appointee; **O=** other actors.

Table 2. Organizational arrangements and perceived outcomes of public appointment processes

Organizational arrangements	1 Board member (INTER)	2 City manager (INTRA)	3 Board member (INTER)	4 Auditor (INTRA)	5 Auditor (INTER)	6 Board member (INTER)	7 Board member (INTER)	8 Auditor (INTRA)	9 Ombudsman (INTRA)	10 Auditor (INTRA)
Transparency (Public advertisement)		X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Job description & education/ professional requirements		(X)	(X)	X		(X)		X	X	X
Media & public awareness		X	X			X			X	
Independent scrutiny		X	X						X	X
Local councillors			X						X	
Local stakeholders			X							
<b>PERCEIVED OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC APPOINTMENT PROCESSES</b>	<b>PATRONAGE</b>	<b>MIXED</b>	<b>GOOD GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>PATRONAGE</b>	<b>PATRONAGE</b>	<b>PATRONAGE</b>	<b>PATRONAGE</b>	<b>PATRONAGE</b>	<b>GOOD GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>MIXED</b>

**Note:** INTRA: intra-organizational appointment; INTER: inter-organizational appointment.

