



Governance and innovation in public sector services: The case of the digital library[☆]



Ada Scupola^{a,*}, Antonello Zanfei^b

^a Roskilde University, Denmark

^b University of Urbino, Italy

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the co-evolution of public governance and innovation, and proposes an adaptation of Hartley's model to take into consideration such co-evolution. This model is then applied to a longitudinal case study of the digitalization of Roskilde University Library. The theoretical and empirical analysis yields four main results. First, it is shown that the transition from a New Public Management approach towards a Networked Governance mode implies a greater distribution of knowledge and innovation across different organisational levels within public administrations. Interactions between such organisational levels crucially affect the development of new public services. Second, a more articulated view of users in public sector innovation is developed. It is argued that: (i) users play distinct roles at different stages in innovation processes, with relatively greater involvement in minor incremental changes; (ii) user-driven innovations have significantly increased with the diffusion of ICTs and Web based public services; and (iii) complex innovations are facilitated by face-to-face meetings between public servants and users. Third, it is suggested that changes in governance modes affect the balance between the different actors involved, thus influencing the nature and intensity of innovation. Fourth and finally, it is argued that the transition towards a networked governance approach requires information policies which persist over time, and are designed to increase collaboration between different (public and private) actors.

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1. Introduction

Previous literature has distinguished three ways of conceptualising public governance, namely the “Traditional” public administration model, the “New Public Management” approach and the “Networked Governance” model (Bennington & Hartley, 2001; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Osborne, 2006; Røste, 2005; Thomas, 2012). These public governance models (or modes) can be associated with specific patterns of public sector innovation (Hartley, 2005).

Building on these contributions, in this paper we argue that the links between public governance and innovation can be better understood as a co-evolutionary process. The idea is that the two phenomena continuously influence each other over time, and are also affected by changes in the environment. To illustrate this, one might consider the establishment

of national health systems (Rosen, 2015, ch. VIII), the launch of big publicly funded scientific projects (Galison & Hevly, 1992), and the modernisation of telecommunications services (Huurdean, 2003, part V). These public sector innovations which have taken place throughout most advanced countries in the 1950s and 1960s cannot be fully understood without contemplating the simultaneous widespread emergence of hierarchically structured public administrations with a top-down approach to decision making. Moreover, these transformations have been strongly affected by a broader institutional and technological context characterised by the emergence of the Keynesian approach to public spending, by the generalised diffusion of welfare policies in most advanced countries; and by the dominance of scale intensive technology. More recent public sector innovations reflect quite different, less hierarchic and more network-like models of public governance, and substantial changes in technological and institutional contexts. These evolutionary processes have been partly documented in studies on the diffusion of ICT within and across public administrations and in the development of public e-services in recent years (Arduini & Zanfei, 2014; Bannister & Connolly, 2015; Van Reenen, Bloom, Draca, Kretschmer, & Sadun, 2010).

However, while extant literature has shown that public governance modes can be associated with specific innovation patterns, previous studies do not fully capture their mutual impact over time, nor do

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* Corresponding author at: Department of Social Science and Business, Roskilde University, Roskilde DK-4000, Denmark.

E-mail addresses: ada@ruc.dk (A. Scupola), antonello.zanfei@uniurb.it (A. Zanfei).

they explicitly take technological and institutional contexts into account. This paper aims to fill this gap in extant literature. To do so, we first review previous contributions and identify Hartley's model – one of the earliest frameworks developed on this topic – as a reference to approximate the links between public governance and innovation. Then we expand and adapt the reference model to analyse the phenomenon under observation (i.e. the co-evolution of public governance and innovation). Finally we apply the (adapted) model to a specific public sector domain – the library service sector – to test and further refine it, taking the insights from the case study into account.

Hence this paper will address three main research questions:

- a) How are public governance and public sector innovation interconnected?
- b) How can Hartley's framework be improved to better account for the links between public governance modes and public sector innovation?
- c) To what extent can such a framework provide useful guidance for the analysis of a specific public sector domain, such as university library services?

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. [Section 2](#) defines the key concepts used in the paper, and discusses their interrelations. [Section 3](#) reviews the extant literature on the links between public governance and innovation, with a special focus on Hartley's contribution. This will help address research questions (a) and (b). [Sections 4 and 5](#) are aimed at answering research question (c). In [Section 4](#), we justify the use of a case study for the purpose of the present analysis and describe the research procedure and methods. [Section 5](#) illustrates how information policy and innovation processes change in the transition from what could be roughly identified as a New Public Management phase to the emergence of a Networked Governance approach in the specific case of Roskilde University Library. [Section 6](#) discusses the main results of the case study and proposes some improvements to Hartley's framework, thus providing a more comprehensive answer to research question (b). [Section 7](#) presents some concluding remarks.

2. Defining key concepts and their interrelations

In this paragraph, we both set the context for our analysis and provide some definitional clarity.

2.1. Public governance

There is no universal agreement on a *public governance* definition (e.g. see [IFAC \(2013\)](#)-Appendix B). The one adopted in this paper derives closely from [UNDP \(1997\)](#): “a set of structural arrangements of public administrations (PAs) affecting the allocation of public resources and the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of their activities.” Our emphasis is on the relationships between government, public bodies and stakeholders, within and across public organisations, and between the public and private entities. It is widely acknowledged that such relationships play a key role in the pursuit of the public sector's official objectives (e.g., reducing poverty, improving health, increasing education, promoting exports).

2.2. Public sector innovation

We hereafter refer to the [EC \(2013\)](#) definition of *public sector innovation* as “a new or significantly improved public service, communication method, process or organisational method for the supply and introduction of such services.” This definition marks a departure from the standard conceptualisations of innovation contained in the Oslo Manual, which had the business sector in mind, particularly privately owned manufacturing companies. Process and organisational innovation in the public sector present important similarities to the private sector, although they may exhibit greater complexity in the case of some public

services ([Gallouj & Zanfei, 2013](#); [Windrum, 2008](#)). Specific types of organisational innovations are “innovations in governance” ([Moore & Hartley, 2010](#)). These consist in new forms of financing, networking and allocating rights in the public sector. They range from relatively circumscribed innovations, such as area forums supporting public sector decision making, to more complex institutional innovations, such as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) or devolution processes from the central government to the regional and local levels.

The emphasis on product innovation found in the Oslo Manual is replaced by a focus on service innovation, which plays a key role in the public sector ([EC, 2011](#)). Moreover, different from the business manufacturing and service sectors, public sector outputs cannot be valued at pure market prices. Hence marketing innovations are replaced by “communication innovations” in the public sector. The latter include new or improved methods of promoting an organisation or its services; new or improved methods of influencing the behaviour of and interactions with intermediate and end users (citizens, firms or other institutions); or the initial commercialisation of public services, whenever they are sold to customers.

2.3. The interdependence between public governance and public sector innovation

As anticipated in the introduction, public governance and public sector innovation influence one another over time. On the one hand, public sector innovations may generate complex processes of social change that will eventually lead to the emergence of new modes of public governance. One may envisage similarities between such processes and those that have been identified in theories of techno-economic paradigms ([Dosi, 1982](#); [Perez, 1983](#)). New paradigms are initiated by fundamental clusters of innovations ([Downes & Nunes, 2014](#); [Helpman, 1998](#); [Perez, 1983](#)) characterised by a series of common features, such as: inducing extensive waves of derived innovations, undermining existing technologies and routines, destabilising dominant market positions, and generating complementary technological and institutional transformations in the long run. ICTs are widely acknowledged to exhibit all of the features ([Harris, 1998](#); [Mansell, Avgerou, Quah, & Silverstone, 2007](#); [Varian, Farrell, & Shapiro, 2004](#)). Similar to the emergence of the long cycle of technological change associated with the generation and diffusion of ICTs, major innovations in governance may undergo complex processes of diffusion and institutional matching. As a result, they will eventually concur with major, historical changes in governance modes. Sparse evidence on this co-evolution can be drawn from the literature on the cluster of innovations associated with the diffusion of eGovernment ([Arduini & Zanfei, 2014](#); [Bannister & Connolly, 2015](#)) and the diffusion of digital library ([Rosselle, 2001](#); [Agre, 2003](#)).

On the other hand, the historical transformations in public governance modes are likely to have an impact on the patterns of public sector innovation. In fact, such historical transformations provide broad avenues that help to identify priorities, and hence, influence the direction and intensity of the technological and organisational innovation that will eventually take place ([Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012](#); [Arthur, 2009](#)).

3. Modeling the links between public governance and innovation

3.1. Paradigms of public governance

Different paradigms of public governance have emerged in recent history, each characterised by the distinctive roles of different actors in the social and economic arena, including politicians, public servants and the civil society (see [Bennington & Hartley, 2001](#); [Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006](#); [Osborne, 2006](#); [Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011](#); [Røste, 2005](#); [Thomas, 2012](#)). [Bennington and Hartley \(2001\)](#)

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