

## The Post-Communist Transformation: An Opportunity for the Economization of the Local Public Sector? The Case of Urban Governance Reforms in East Germany

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### ABSTRACT

Research on state and administration reforms emphasizes the various processes of economization, involving privatization, deregulation and managerialization measures. Following the diffusionist paradigm, these evolutions are ascribed to a neo-liberal ideological convergence, said to prevail all over Europe. Such analyses usually neglect social practices and interactions involved in the diffusion processes. This paper offers a sociological study focusing on the actors and the activities that contribute to the implementation of a new governance model in the public sector. Relying on empirical investigations conducted in the former GDR, I examine how reformers from different professional fields have promoted these doctrines at the local level. The post-communist space is generally regarded as a breeding ground for a new governance model as state and bureaucracy were discredited. This analysis shows, however, that the impact of economical and managerial doctrines in the transformation of the East German local public sector has actually been rather limited.

**Keywords:** administration; post-communism; reform; new public management; governance

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The application of economic principles to the public sector is not a new development. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, research on state and administration reforms has shown an acceleration of this process, called "economization" in the international literature – particularly by German authors. (Harms and Reichard 2003; Knorr 2005) What does this concept actually mean? Jens Harms and Chris-

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toph Reichard (2003) define it as a stronger orientation of public activity toward economic rationality, while the economist Holger Mühlenkamp, who argues that it is often used imprecisely, describes it as the consistent application of the “first dogma of economics, i.e. the production of efficiency”. (2003, 48)

### 1.1 A critical approach of the diffusionist paradigm

Scholars converge in describing this economization of the public sector as a global trend (Löffler 2003) that first appeared in the US and UK (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004), then extended to continental Europe (Derlien 1997) before reaching the post-communist area, where the reform of public administration has been both a challenge for the post-communist transformation (Dimitrova 2011) and a condition for the accession to the European Union since the 1990s. (Bouckaert 2009)<sup>2</sup> Moreover the post-communist space is regarded as a breeding ground for the implementation of economic principles, in a context where the state and bureaucracy are discredited among the “new” elites. (Dubois, Lozac’h and Rowell 2005)

What should we make of this global trend? According to the literature on the topic, the process of economization could be partly explained by the resonance of theories such as public choice and the Austrian school of self-regulation or managerialism, which form its intellectual foundations. (Löffler 2003) It is also attributed to the political success of neo-liberalism (Vogel 2006, 228), whose imposition as the dominant ideology is denounced by some authors. (Pelizzari 2001) Indeed, the welfare state has been challenged in Western Europe and in post-communist countries, where the transition followed a “neo-liberal intellectual blueprint drawn up within the walls of American academia and shaped by international institutions”. (Przeworski 1992, 46) In other words, the economization of the public sector is generally ascribed to a “*zeitgeist*” leading to a neoliberal ideological convergence all over Europe. (Reichard 2003, 122; Vogel 2006, 226)

However, such ideas-centered analyses (Ganev 2005) tend to neglect the variety of the forms of economization observed, otherwise noted in many studies. (Löffler 2003) This process includes various aspects involving privatization and deregulation policies aimed at reducing public expenditure as well as managerialization measures aimed at converting the public sector to business and market-based rationales. These precepts are mainly promoted through New Public Management (NPM), which was widely disseminated by US think tanks and international institutions from the 1980s on. (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Hood 1998) They succeeded in presenting this doctrine as a universal model of administration and governance, focused on efficiency, implementable in every context. (Christensen and Lægreid 2001)

Far from providing a consistent model, NPM is actually a “doctrinal puzzle” (Bezes 2009, 3) combining several dimensions. Its main components are “hands-on professional management that allows for active, visible, discretionary control of an organization by persons who are free to manage, explicit standards of performance,

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<sup>2</sup> Although the EU has no direct competence in this field, “administrative capacity” (introduced at the Madrid European Council in 1995) has become an increasingly important criterion for candidate countries. (Verheijen 2003)

greater emphasis on output control, increased competition, contracts, devolution, disaggregation of units, and private sector management techniques". (Christensen and Lægreid 2001, 78) Comparative studies on the reception of doctrines also emphasize the heterogeneity of the practical reforms inspired by neo-managerialism. (Pollitt 2002; Christensen and Laegreid 2007, 2010; Beck and Larat 2011)

These differentiated "acclimatizations" of NPM are attributed to the diversity of national administrative legacies, political regimes or modernization trajectories. (Eymeri-Douzans and Pierre 2011) Other studies emphasize the limits faced by post-communist countries in the implementation of managerial reforms. Advocating a mix of practices from different national administrative traditions, the EU has not directly contributed to the conversion of new member states to neo-managerialism. (Verheijen 2003, Meyer-Sahling 2011) In spite of seemingly favorable conditions, the importation of New Public Management has partly failed in the post-communist area (Drechsler 2005; Randma-Liiv 2008/2009)<sup>3</sup>, to the benefit of the neo-Weberian state (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004), a hybrid model that borrows from classical principles of bureaucracy as well as from neo-managerial precepts and from new forms of governance. (Mendes 2006)

From a theoretical point of view, these studies stress that ideas-centered analyses are insufficient, even paradoxical, in that they are likely to produce a linear and homogenizing vision of the international dissemination of economical doctrines on public-sector reform. Ideas-centered analyses are characterized by two blind spots, which are partly due to their lack of empirical foundations. Postulating that doctrines spread through the power of the beliefs they generate, they usually neglect the social practices and interactions involved in their diffusion. (Ganev 2005) Moreover, they tend to confuse the audience for given ideas with their effective implementation in the public sector, as they underestimate the power struggles that arise in the reform process and consequently the strategies of adaptation or resistance that may be implemented.

## 1.2 A political sociology of economization processes

In contrast with the diffusionist approaches, I propose a political sociology of economization, considering that the transposition of market-oriented models into public-sector reform must be understood as the product of the practices, the representations and the relationships of the actors involved. (Dubois 2009) I argue that it is also important to pay great attention to the conditions and the contexts of reception of the doctrines in the political and administrative fields.

Based on several field studies in the former GDR, I concretely examine how reformers from different professional fields have promoted the implementation of a "new" form of urban governance, partly based on economical and managerial mod-

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<sup>3</sup> According to experts in the field, this failure is due to the mismatch between the difficulties faced by Eastern European administrations and the solutions offered by the NPM: they argued "that the deregulation of public administration and the delegation of discretion to public sector managers would not be suitable in a context that lacked the tradition of a strong public service ethos and respect for the rule of law". Academics as well as practitioners "therefore considered that administrative reforms along the lines of the classic continental *Rechtsstaat* tradition were more suitable for CEE states than reforms inspired by the new public management". (Mayer-Sahling 2009, 15)

els. However, I also show that due to the combined importance of political and administrative legacies and Western imports, the role of these doctrines in the modernization of the East German local public sector has actually remained fairly limited. These findings are consistent with those of Aron Buzogány and Andrej Stuchlik (2010): we must consider the interactions between external influences and local heritages in our efforts to understand the successes and failures of the administrative reforms in post-communist Europe. Though some scholars argue that the newly (re-) founded *Länder* constitute a separate case<sup>4</sup>, empirical evidence indicates that their transformation takes the form of a recombination (Stark 1991), comparable to the processes at work in their Central and Eastern European counterparts.

## 2. Forms and actors of the economization process

Germany is no stranger to the success of governance, a word that “suddenly [was] on everyone’s lips” in the 2000s. (Kuhlmann 2004, 223) Described by some as the “new magic word of administration reform” (Nullmeier 2007, 15), governance has been used to refer to a patchwork of projects conceived and promoted by a coalition of West German reformers who have focused their interest on the local level, particularly in the former GDR.

### 2.1 A plurality of reform projects with varying contents

#### 2.1.1 Managerialization and privatization

In the early 1990s, Gerhard Banner, head of the Joint Local Government Center for Management Studies (*KGSSt*)<sup>5</sup>, published an article criticizing the bureaucratization of municipal administration. On budgetary and financial grounds, he denounced a system of organized irresponsibility (Banner 1991) and proposed setting up a New Steering Model (*das neue Steuerungsmodell* or *NSM*), commonly presented as a German version of New Public Management. (Reichard 1996) Based on principles of efficiency and profitability borrowed from the private sector, *NSM* aims at increasing efficiency and reducing municipal expenditure.<sup>6</sup> Initially, the reform focused primarily on the internal organizational and management structures of local administrative authorities: it recommended, among other things, a clear division between political and administrative authorities, a decentralization of operative responsibilities, result-oriented management implemented through the introduction of such instruments as integrated decentralized responsibility for results and resources, flexible and product-based budgeting, cost-accounting, monitoring and evaluation of results and related costs, etc. (Reichard 2003)

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<sup>4</sup> According to these studies, the situation of the *Länder* differs fundamentally from the rest of the former Soviet bloc, in that their transformation “has been greatly shaped, in the course of German unification, by the ‘institutional transfer’ from West to East Germany”. (Wollmann 2010, 251)

<sup>5</sup> The *Kommunale Gemeinschaftsstelle für Verwaltungsvereinfachung* (*KGSSt*) was created in Cologne in 1949 in order to help West German municipalities rationalize their administration’s activities.

<sup>6</sup> This argument has been a leitmotif for two decades. The presentation held during the *KGSSt*’s September 2002 general assembly again emphasized the risks related to financial problems in local authorities.

In line with neo-liberal ideology, the reform projects also called for “rolling back” the state to the benefit of the private sector. An increasing number of German local authorities decided to give up some of their traditional duties “under the combined effect of the European Commission’s market liberalization policy and of their budgetary plight”. (Wollmann 2004, 654) Since the early 1990s, “there has been a new wave of outsourcing administrative enterprises from local budgets to separate economic entities” (Dafflon 2002, 159), which takes two forms: while “material” privatization results in the complete withdrawal of the local authorities, “formal” privatization puts the public-utilities sector under the responsibility of independent enterprises ruled by private law but still owned by local government. While these reforms were originally restricted to technical sectors (energy, water, waste treatment, etc.), they were then gradually extended to sports, social and cultural facilities. (Naßmacher and Naßmacher 1999, 165)

The privatization measures were particularly extensive in the former GDR, where municipal authorities had to transfer many structures inherited from the communist regime (nurseries, kindergartens, etc.) to the non-profit sector, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, which entrusts associations and charities with providing welfare services and thus promotes partnership arrangements between so-called ‘free carriers’ (*freie Träger*) and the state in fields such as health and social services. (Priller et al. 1999, 99)

### 2.1.2 From New Public Management to governance

In the mid-1990s and onwards, the reform projects underwent some reorientations. The NSM-model of the “manager state” gave way to the “activating state” (*aktivierender Staat*), focused on a new sharing of responsibilities between state and society. (Jann 2006) This new model is inspired by the US conception of *empowerment* that intends to strengthen the capacity for action of individuals or groups (Bacqué 2005) in order to promote their power of initiative and of decision-making but also to hold them responsible and accountable for outcomes. This general trend can to some extent be observed in the recommendations of the *KGSt*, which gradually developed a less internal and technocratic reform concept. (Reichard 2003) From around 1996, its staff began to supplement and expand the New Steering Model with additional elements meant to improve the administrations’ relationships with their customers, by implementing instruments such as quality management and one-stop agencies, even if the citizen focus remained a secondary concern for this modernization doctrine. (Reichard 2002)

At the same time, studies on local policies devoted increasing attention to new forms of democracy. (Heinelt 2006, 145) Different projects introduced the perspective of citizen participation in the modernization debate. (Bogumil and Holkamp 2007) In cooperation with two foundations, Bertelsmann<sup>7</sup> and Hans-Böckler<sup>8</sup>, the

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<sup>7</sup> Created in 1977 to conceive, initiate and implement projects in cooperation with public and private institutions, Bertelsmann is the largest private company of its kind in Germany.

<sup>8</sup> Foundation of the Confederation of German Trade Unions (*DGB*).

KGSt established the “Cities of the Future” network<sup>9</sup>, which developed the *Bürgerkommune* concept (municipality of the citizens), aimed at complementing the internal reform of the administration with participative mechanisms. This concept combines several features intended to simplify administrative procedures, involve citizens in municipal affairs and strengthen local democracy. It relied on various tools, such as the organization of round tables and forums, the functional and territorial decentralization of the administration and the recourse to new technologies. Other reform initiatives also tried to offer new participation opportunities, such as user groups or planning cells, and to reinforce civic collaboration with emphasis on self-help and voluntary engagement. (Reichard 2002)

In the late 1990s, the scientific and practical debate focused more on the interactions between municipal services and their environment. (Bogumil 2002, 45) Reforms encouraged the participation of civil society in local politics on a broader scale as well as different forms of interaction and cooperation (Bogumil 2002, 55), such as public-private partnerships (especially in local development policies). In line with the precepts of governance, emphasis was henceforth placed on the role of private actors, while the municipality tended to lose its position as monopolistic service producer to become a network coordinator. (Reichard 2002) While reform projects have laid more emphasis on participative mechanisms since the 2000s, the economic dogma of performance, efficiency and cost effectiveness remains a central concern of the coalition of reformers in a context of financial crisis. (Lozac’h 2012a)

### 2.1.3 Conceptual filiations: a destatization of public policy

The filiations between the New Steering Model and governance can be detected in the principles they both promote, which combine a managerial rationale and political preoccupations. While New Public Management mainly emphasizes the economic and financial aspects of reform, it also strives to consolidate the citizens’ position in their dealings with the administration (Reichard 2002), even though the citizen is generally reduced to a client-customer whose expectations and demands must be met by public services. (Pesqueux 2010) The “activating State” model is similarly ambivalent: it advocates support destatization to the benefit of civil society and of the market alike, following New Public Management doctrines. (Holtkamp, Bogumil and Kißler 2006) The two models specifically converge on the idea that the State must share responsibilities and tasks. This is also a core principle of the governance model, which proposes a plural and interactive approach of power bringing together multiple actors. (Gaudin 2002)

Gerhard Banner himself underlines the link between the German reformist approaches of the 1990s and the governance model. According to him, the governance model relies on criteria similar to those set by the Prize for Democracy and Efficiency in Local Government awarded by the Bertelsmann Foundation in 1993. (Banner 2002, 249) Marga Pröhl, who was in charge of the State and Administration Department of this foundation and Visiting Professor at Speyer University, also

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<sup>9</sup> This network supports around seventy local authorities in their reform initiatives by favoring the diffusion of experiments and innovations in the fields of public policy and administrative management.

insists on this point: the jury took into consideration citizen participation in local decision-making, even if managerial instruments were obviously foregrounded at that time. (Pröhl 2002)

More generally, the customer focus of the New Steering Model is presented as “the first and necessary step” towards “more citizen orientation and empowerment”, insofar as “being included as a customer or even a co-producer of public services”, the citizen is no longer considered “a passive subject of state action”. (Pröhl 2002, 8) Making the kinship with the New Steering Model even clearer, the use of the term governance has been widespread in German reformist circles since the 2000s. For instance, the Bertelsmann Foundation started addressing “Good governance” at the local level, while the 2002 edition of the annual *Modern State – Modern Administration* conference focused on this topic and saw the creation of an award for good local governance. Beyond these conceptual affinities, there is a strategic dimension to the way in which governance caught on in Germany. Thanks to its semantic ambiguity (Gaudin 2002; Georgakakis 2012), this “catch-all” word brought together several disparate initiatives under a common label and became a shared reference for advocates of public-action modernization at the local level. (Lozac'h 2012b)

## 2.2 Production and promotion of the reform doctrines

### 2.2.1 A broad coalition of reformers

Different actors and institutions have contributed to the success of urban governance, at least as a reform model, in Germany, largely because it fulfils aspirations for modernization which have been expressed in the local public sector since the late 1980s. These aspirations were concretely promoted by a “reform coalition” (Wollmann 1996, 23) bringing together municipal organizations, such as the *KGSt*, which appears as the driving force in the modernization process of local public policy, or the German Association of Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*), as well as foundations funded by private companies, political parties and unions, consulting offices which entered the administrative market by developing a practice-oriented managerial discourse and, finally, academics and researchers from various institutes and university departments.

From the 1970s on, economists specializing in corporate management worked to institutionalize public management as an academic discipline<sup>10</sup> and to assert their administrative expertise by developing reform concepts informed by neo-managerialism. They were later joined by specialists in urban planning<sup>11</sup> as well as in political and administrative science, especially from the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, which holds a key position in the circle of modernizers. While

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<sup>10</sup> If “public management as an academic field” remains “poorly institutionalized and rather fragmented in Germany” (Reichard 2008, 42), some universities have developed degree programs in this discipline. For instance, the University of Potsdam has developed master’s programs in public management and European governance as well as a “Graduate School of Modern Governance”. Between 1997 and 2006 the Public Management department was led by Christoph Reichard, who was directly involved in the conception of the new steering model.

<sup>11</sup> The German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu), founded in Berlin in 1973, develops research programs, offers lifelong learning seminars and hosts a database on urban policies.

academics played only a very small part in the elaboration of the NSM, which was “purely driven by practitioners, mainly by city managers” (Reichard 2008, 56), they did benefit from the foundations’ funding, used to carry out several surveys evaluating the implementation of this model.

The orientations and evolutions of the reform projects are partly linked with the background of the coalition members. The initial dominance of business economists, a German specificity (Schedler 2006), prompted a technical and managerial conception of administrative modernization, embodied by the New Steering Model. As political scientists and urban planners later came into play, they too may have made some contributions to citizen participation and cooperation with organized civil society.

Thus, the governance model was disseminated by several institutions forming a nebula of reformers (Topalov 1999), i.e. a loose conglomeration of organizations linked together by identifiable networks between which key actors circulate. Gerhard Banner exemplifies the plurality of positions of these actors: in the early 1990s, he was simultaneously the *KGS*t director, a visiting professor at the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer and the president of the Bertelsmann Foundation’s Advisory Board. Other core reformists also held posts either concurrently or successively in the latter two organizations.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the creation of cooperation structures on reform projects contributed to the institutionalization of these networks. Among others, the New Steering Model working group included experts from the University of Administrative Sciences Speyer and from the German Association of Cities brought together by the *KGS*t and the Bertelsmann Foundation.

### 2.2.2 Several diffusion strategies

How did these institutions and actors concretely work for the promotion of their reform model at the municipal level? They “succeeded in disseminating its conceptual ideas through numerous avenues”, mainly initiated by the *KGS*t, whose staff carried out “extremely intensive missionary activities” in the 1990s. (Reichard 2003, 351)

First, the modernizers used their position as experts to produce a normative and prescriptive literature by issuing numerous practical recommendations and evaluation reports, intended to support the reform initiatives of local political and administrative staff. The topic of modernization was also highlighted in journals specializing in administrative issues, such as *Verwaltung-Organisation-Personal* (VOP), *die innovative verwaltung* (iv)<sup>13</sup> and *Verwaltung & Management* (VM)<sup>14</sup>, which encourage the development of neo-managerialism in short columns often written by consul-

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<sup>12</sup> For example Marga Pröhl or Bernd Adamaschek, project manager in the Bertelsmann Foundation, and also visiting lecturer at the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer.

<sup>13</sup> The interest in this topic and especially in the new steering model seems undeniably related to the influence of the key reformist actors in these journals: Gerhard Banner was a member of the VOP editorial board, whereas Herman Hill and Helmut Klages, who both taught at the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer co-published *die innovative verwaltung* until 1998.

<sup>14</sup> *Verwaltung & Management* was created in 1995, at the beginning of the NSM reform, and was intended to “accompany this phenomenon discursively” (2006), according to its former publisher, Heinrich Reinerman, who was also rector and professor at the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer.

tants. (Vogel 2006) The organization of presentations<sup>15</sup> and forums, such as the annual *Modern State – Modern Administration* conference, contributes to increasing the visibility of the reformist undertaking to an ever-larger audience. The awarding of prizes for reform projects carried out at the municipal level served as further instruments to “help pusillanimous directors who do not dare to join the modernization movement”. (Banner 2002, 252) The German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer introduced such awards in 1992, whereas the Bertelsmann Foundation decided in 1993 to focus its annual award (in existence since 1988) on the theme of democracy and efficiency in local administration.<sup>16</sup> These awards were not only meant to measure and reward the capacity of local representatives to modernize their administration; they were also a way to stigmatize the backwardness and the lagging reforms of German municipalities on an international scale.<sup>17</sup>

In short, the reform coalition was able to mobilize both material and symbolic resources to promote its governance model at the local level. The German modernizers benefited from the significant financial resources of the Bertelsmann Foundation, while the *KGS*'s monopoly over consulting in municipal organizations helped legitimize their projects. (Laux 1995, 230 ff.) The New Steering Model received such a broad response partly because its advocates combined key positions in prestigious institutions and careers staked by a circulation between different professional fields.<sup>18</sup>

The importation of managerial techniques into the public sector has prompted some criticism in the academic field. Early in the process, jurists and social scientists expressed their distrust of public-sector economization. (Derlien 2002; König 2001; Laux 1993) As it likens public administration to private companies and citizens to customers, this doctrine tends to overlook the political dimension of local government and therefore its need for legality and legitimacy. (Drechsler 2008) Some researchers initially close to the modernizers' circles also later denounced the failure of NSM, which did not achieve its main objective, i.e. making public administration more efficient. (Holtkamp 2007) Although the urban governance model did have a significant echo in Germany and ended up being an inescapable reference in local public-sector modernization, several surveys studied have shown that it has yielded rather limited results, particularly in the former GDR.

### 3. A limited implementation

While I have so far shown that the local governance model was widely disseminated in the field of public-sector modernization in Germany, the implementation of its principles and instruments in municipalities is a different story altogether. Although

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<sup>15</sup> According to Hellmut Wollmann, Gerhard Banner gave 170 talks on the new steering model between 1991 and 1996. (Wegrich et al. 1997)

<sup>16</sup> The jury assembled on that occasion comprises representatives of the reformist core: Gerhard Banner as president and professors Hill, Klages and Reichard.

<sup>17</sup> The results of the Bertelsmann Foundation's 1993 awards, which had no German municipalities among its winners, were met with shock and alarm by German municipal representatives, since they explicitly questioned the administrative performance of the local authorities.

<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Banner's career – he was successively or simultaneously city manager, *KGS* president, professor, consultant for various organizations and SPD member – exemplifies a social capital based on the successive or simultaneous occupation of positions in various institutions in the political and administrative field.

the local context seemed favorable, various studies reveal that despite the endorsement of many West German reformers, governance did not necessarily translate into policy at the local level, especially in the Eastern part of the country.

### 3.1 Germany: a breeding ground for governance?

Some scholars explain the international success of governance concepts by the capacity for exportation of the Anglo-American model. (Gaudin 2002) In the German case, it is also rooted in a public-policy tradition based on partnership and negotiation between State institutions and social forces, relying on a significant network of intermediary organizations. (Benz 1997)

Historically, the introduction of “new” forms of governance mostly reflects the institutionalization of a tradition of co-operation between local authorities and several independent institutions (the so-called *freie Träger*). As Hubert Heinelt points out, “these considerations are not new in the academic debate on local policies in Germany – even though the term ‘governance’ was not always directly used”.<sup>19</sup> Political scientists have in fact demonstrated a precocious interest in “wider forms of involvement in shaping policies” (Heinelt 2006, 140), notably in the local policy research working group (*Lokale Politikforschung*), which has studied the “interaction between municipal actors and actors from the various spheres of local society in elaborating policies” for a long time. (Heinelt 2006, 146)

This national tradition might have proved to be fertile ground for the precepts of governance. But German reunification represented a “window of opportunity” (Kingdon 1995) for the modernizing circles, which benefited from this context to legitimize the need for reforms combining (more) efficiency and democracy at the local level. Reunification indeed created conditions that facilitated the reception of the governance model, giving more credence to the arguments developed by its proponents. In economic terms, many municipalities in the former GDR faced major financial problems that required them to make significant cuts in public spending. In political terms, the implementation of new forms of citizen participation constituted a particularly important challenge in the former GDR, which was strongly affected by the erosion of the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy, usually ascribed to the phenomenon of “political moroseness” (*Politikverdrossenheit*) since the 1980s. Various studies emphasize the distrust of (East) German citizens towards political institutions and politics in general. (Gaiser and al. 2000) Given its participative dimension, the governance model seemed suited to fulfilling the aspirations for direct democracy expressed in the civic movements of the fall of 1989.

Lastly and more generally, some observers see East German towns as a breeding ground for the modernization of local administration (Wegrich et al. 1997), meant to remedy the inertia induced by existing organization systems and routines that stood in the way of reforming Western municipal administrations.

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<sup>19</sup> This is partly because “the institutional or ‘governmental’ approach to questions such as ‘how to govern?’ or ‘how to ensure governability?’ has remained predominant” in Germany, because “those who are interested in local policies are first and foremost (in their academic position) advocates of public administration, public policies, compared government and so on.” (2006, 146)

West German experts on administration and public policy have thus paid close attention to the new *Länder*.<sup>20</sup> They grasped the opportunities offered by the political and economic context of reunification to promote new forms of management and governance at the local level. This is especially true for the *KGS*, whose staff was strongly involved in the restructuring of the Eastern municipalities by providing framework documents and practical advice. *KGS* also relied on the work made by researchers in political and administrative science on the topic. Many studies conducted in East German municipalities in fact attest to an intellectual shift: surveys on the implementation of the New Steering Model in the former GDR were progressively introduced into the analysis of the transformations in these local authorities.<sup>21</sup>

Given the central role played by the *KGS* in municipal (re-)organization, East German towns may have been privileged laboratories for the transposition of economic and managerial doctrines to the public sector. Yet, it seems that municipal representatives failed to meet these expectations, often favoring the implementation of “archaic and centralist Western administrative models”. (Reichard 1994, 68) How can we explain this apparent paradox?

### 3.2 The gap between the diffusion of models and reform implementation

West German reformers ultimately did not receive as much interest as they expected in the former GDR. In the mid 1990s, some authors began to note that opportunities for innovation had been wasted in Eastern cities (Hill 1993): neo-managerialism received a muted response there, as in the post-communist space on the whole.

#### 3.2.1 Varying outcomes in West and East German municipalities

According to Christoph Reichard, there was “clear evidence that municipalities in the new German *Länder*” were “somewhat lagging behind in the reform process”, which had seen “greater success in the old part of the republic”. (2003, 355) These observations were based on several surveys conducted on the initiative of the German Association of Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*) and the German Institute of Urban Affairs (*Difu*).<sup>22</sup> Their results shed light on some significant differences between West and East Germany regarding the interest of municipal authorities in managerial reforms: 36% envisioned implementing them soon in the West, against only 8%

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<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Western experts saw Central and Eastern European countries as laboratories for the development of new administrative systems according to Tony Verheijen (2003).

<sup>21</sup> An example is the book *Kommunale Verwaltungspolitik in Ostdeutschland*, written in 1997 by a group of young researchers who worked Hellmut Wollmann, then Professor of Political Science at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Also partly funded by the Hans-Boeckler Foundation, this research project was explicitly aimed at evaluating the possibilities and limits of administrative modernization following the new steering model in East German municipalities.

<sup>22</sup> Assessing the scale and the effectiveness of attempts at modernizing local government in Germany proves, however, to be a difficult task. Sabine Kuhlmann points out the “deficit of evaluation” in a literature that is surprisingly silent on the results, effects and costs of reforms inspired by managerial techniques. (Kuhlmann 2003a, 99)

in the East.<sup>23</sup> A survey by the German Association of Cities showed similar differences regarding the effectiveness of the modernization process in 195 municipalities: 84% in the West were described as active in this field in 1995, against only 53% in the East.

While later studies confirmed these results, they also showed a gradual reduction of the initial gap: in 1998, 96% of Western municipalities and 79% of Eastern municipalities were characterized as active in the field of public-sector reform (96% and 84% respectively in 2000). These differences could therefore be interpreted as a simple lag of local governments in the former GDR, where NPM-inspired reforms were taken up in the late 1990s, following the pace set in West German municipalities. (Wollmann 2004) This lag is generally attributed to the context of institutional transformation. Sabine Kuhlmann emphasizes the extent of the problems faced by local authorities in the East, less able to “mobilize resources and capacities for action” (2003b, 7) to implement managerial reforms. However, this analysis seems incomplete in light of the persistence of disparities between East and West.

A more recent survey on the implementation of the New Steering Model in more than 1000 German municipalities evidences differences both in terms of the impetus for modernization and of the actual modernization.<sup>24</sup> (Bogumil et al. 2007, 99) Concrete experiences of modernization appear less advanced in former GDR municipalities, regarding decentralization of resources, contract management and staff policy alike. Some figures from the abovementioned survey provide an illustration of these differences: 35.8% of Western municipalities decentralized all administrative resources, as opposed to 16.9% in the East. Similarly, 16.8% of Western municipalities introduced contract management between the administration and the municipal council, as opposed to 3.2% in the East.<sup>25</sup>

This quantitative data has been corroborated by qualitative studies (Wegrich et al. 1997; Jaedicke, Thrün and Wollmann 2000) which also showed that East German municipalities were not particularly fertile ground for the implementation of economic and managerial doctrines, even noting a greater distrust of modernization measures – such as budgeting, assessment of cost and performance, etc. – in the East. (Hill 1997; Thumfart 2002) They reported that privatization and marketization policies are seen in a critical light by some Eastern municipal staff, who accuse them of undermining the traditional mission of public service.<sup>26</sup> Generally, city councillors are afraid that privatization measures will diminish their political control on several local sectors. They are all the more reluctant as the reform projects are implemented primarily by and for the municipal executive, while city councillors are mainly

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<sup>23</sup> These figures are quoted in the study *Im Osten was Neues: Verwaltungsreform in ostdeutschen Städten und Gemeinden*, conducted by Michael Bürsch for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of the German Social Democratic party (SPD) in 1995.

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that the findings of this study are based on information collected through questionnaires filled by staffers in municipalities, which imperfectly measure the real extent of the reforms inspired by the new steering model.

<sup>25</sup> Only transfers of municipal structures towards the non-profit sector appear more numerous in the former GDR because of the communist legacy.

<sup>26</sup> These criticisms are also shared by West German municipal staff. (Naßmacher and Naßmacher 1999)

excluded from their design according to a survey conducted in 2004 (Knipp 2005). Administrative staff seem to have used the introduction of these reforms as an opportunity to consolidate their position at the local level.

On the other hand, the interactions between municipal services and their environment actually seem to have increased; partnerships involving administrative staff, elected officials, representatives of the non-profit sector and of the industrial sector at the local level have become more common. Working groups, round tables and public-private partnerships are increasingly popular, especially in the economic field with the establishment of technology centers and economic development agencies. (Mayer 1993) In the former GDR, the post-communist transformation has even contributed to the emergence of original forms of partnership aimed at addressing the economic and social problems connected with the transition to the market. This is particularly true regarding vocational integration programs at the local level, where the *Treuhandanstalt*<sup>27</sup> and the trade unions have jointly set up employment companies (*Beschäftigungsgesellschaften*) in order to fight mass unemployment. In the 1990s, these new institutions played a mediation role in the restructuring of the local economy. (Bafoil 1998) While West German unions have remained focused on wage bargaining, their Eastern counterparts have become important partners of local authorities on professional reintegration.

Despite a few original initiatives, East German municipalities also seem less inclined to develop local-governance networks than their Western counterparts. (Thumfart 2002) Likewise, public-private partnerships mainly increased in Western municipalities. Eastern local authorities very rarely position themselves as intermediaries between different interest groups in the economic sector. (Giese 1999) Administrative staff also express some distrust toward the involvement of the so-called “organized civil society”. They consider this delegation of responsibilities to possibly result in the neglect of some missions in the social and cultural sector. (Naßmacher and Naßmacher 1999) The introduction of participative mechanisms elicits similar criticisms among local officials. Indeed, the institutionalization of consultative practices tends to undermine the position of elected representatives, who risk being challenged by non-profit organizations or lobbies in the decision-making process.<sup>28</sup> More symbolically, this governance model challenges the specificity of political skills and thereby questions the legitimacy of elected officials by blurring the line between the “profane” and political professionals. Thus, many elected representatives are sceptical if not concerned about the introduction of new forms of participation: they question the ability of ordinary citizens to take part in decisions that affect the entire local community.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The *Treuhandanstalt* is the federal organization in charge of privatizing the East German economy.

<sup>28</sup> These criticisms are not specific to the former GDR; they are also expressed in West Germany (Gabriel and Eisenmann 2005) and other European countries.

<sup>29</sup> These comments were collected during interviews with members of the SGK (Social-democrat community for municipal politics), conducted in Berlin in 2002.

3.2.2 *The combined impact of communist legacies and of Western transfers*

Such results might seem somewhat surprising given the assumptions made by the West German reformers. To understand this apparent paradox, it is worth reconsidering the post-communist transformation context in which the diffusion of the governance model effectively takes place. As underlined by David Stark,

the collapse of the formal structures of the socialist regime does not result in an institutional vacuum. Instead, we find the persistence of routines and practices, organizational forms and social ties, that can become assets, resources, and the basis for credible commitments and coordinated actions in the post-socialist period. (1996, 995)

Contrary to the myth of a “virgin territory” initially postulated by reformers, the administrative reform process is shaped, in various ways, by the legacies of the former GDR. Consequently, their impact should to some extent explain the relative lack of impact of economical and managerial tools in Eastern municipalities.

Several authors attribute the distrust of East German municipal staff in part to the persistence of values and norms internalized during their socialization under communism. These reforms, which all aim to reduce the scope of local government to the benefit of the private sector, are thought to conflict with the “interventionist” view of public service inherited from the previous regime. Some also point out that reluctance toward the influence of civil society might be due to the legacy of the administrative paternalism (Bernet and Lecheler 1990) that characterized the relationships between the communist bureaucracy and the population in the former regime. (Thumfart 2002) Conversely, other scholars emphasize the passivity of the ex-GDR citizens (Gabriel 1997), assumed to be deprived of the cognitive and organizational resources – i.e. the “suitable” habits, routines or structures – usually required to participate in urban governance.

While lack of citizen involvement has been a particularly important problem in the post-communist context, the urban governance model raises more general questions in terms of democracy. Some denounce the introduction of participative systems as a purely “cosmetic” measure, as they do not actually help broadening the scope of participation at the local level, but mainly allow members of the population who are already involved in local politics to participate more intensively. (Gabriel and Eisenmann 2005) They do not, on the other hand, attract the citizens who are traditionally more or less excluded from political activity (the young, the poor, the foreigners, etc.). Therefore, urban governance only has a limited impact as far as the renewal of democratic practices is concerned. Local public policy often continues to rely on a selective conception of policy networks inherited from West German neo-corporatism (Lehmbruch 1982), which holds that participation in the management of municipal affairs is restricted to a few actors and organizations, such as political and economical elites, experts or interest groups.

The relative lack of impact of managerial and economic doctrines in the former GDR may also be due to the institutional transfer strategy (Lehmbruch 1998) that characterized the post-communist transformation in the (East) German case.

Municipal-administration reform has thus largely been supported by experts from the “old” federal states, through the institutionalization of inter-communal partnerships, the secondment and the recruitment of West German officials or the establishment of training programs. According to Hellmut Wollmann, this configuration could only be beneficial to administrative models which have already been tried and tested in practice. It is therefore not highly surprising that in the early 1990s,

the West German advisers, including the highly influential *KGS* ..., as well as the East German management staff have relied upon a traditional organizational framework whose strengths and weaknesses are pretty much known, instead of taking the risk of implementing a new organization, that was still inexperienced in the former Federal Republic. (1996, 164)

Despite their involvement in the modernization of local public service, the experts from the *KGS* seem to have merely exported the recommendations they advocated for several decades in West German cities.

Lastly, on a related note, the process through which East German municipal employees were familiarized with their new role has also contributed to the perpetuation of the classical administration model. Training programs have given priority to the transmission of a traditional conception of administrative activity, centered on legal knowledge, to the detriment of professional practices inspired by New Public Management. This is more generally due to the continued domination of law and jurists in the administrative training delivered in unified Germany, which contributes to the perpetuation of a legalistic culture and rule-based steering in all public-sector organizations. (Reichard 2008).

Despite its institutionalization as an academic discipline, public management has not really made a mark in public-administration colleges.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, West German officials seconded to the new *Länder* played a significant role in disseminating a view of administrative work that emphasizes compliance with rules and procedures. This demonstrates, on the one hand, the effects of their own professional socialization, insofar as they have often replicated the skills and the routines accumulated during their training and their previous career. On the other hand, they also mobilized this knowledge of rules and procedures as a resource to legitimize their status as administrative experts and thereby consolidate their positions in East German municipal governments. (Lozac'h 2008) Besides the impact of communist legacies, the professional backgrounds of these officials, as well as the contexts in which they carried out their counselling duties appear to have been factors in the relative lack of impact of economical and managerial doctrines in the former GDR.

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<sup>30</sup> Only three of them – out of about thirty – have a department devoted to public-sector management and administrative modernization.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have advocated a sociological approach that stresses the need to support a contextualized approach of diffusion processes, in order to understand the various ways in which the governance model has been shaped and adapted by local actors. This conclusion is consistent with those made by comparative studies, which emphasize that the implementation of reforms cannot be reduced to the pure and simple application of a new doctrine. (Jobert 1994) Contrary to the diffusionist paradigm, which pays little attention to “the changes affecting the original model during its successive transplantations” (Delpuech 2008, 9), I argue that it is necessary to focus on the different strategies of selection, appropriation or even resistance that characterize the circulation of ideas.

Empirical studies show more particularly how West German bureaucratic routines and state conceptions inherited from the communist system have contributed to limiting the importation of both neo-managerial instruments and participative mechanisms at the local level. Despite the initial expectations of the modernizers’ circles, who underestimated the influence of structural constraints, professional socialization and political representations, the former GDR municipalities are far from a particularly suitable breeding ground for the new governance model.

Overall, the East German case provides a useful example of the effects of Communist legacies on the reform process, which go some way toward explaining the muted response to managerial doctrines in the political and administrative field. This, in turn, suggests reconsidering the postulate, frequently found in studies on state modernization, of the compatibility between neo-liberalism and neo-managerialism. On the one hand, the political success of the neo-liberal ideology does not necessarily translate into the implementation of neo-managerial reforms in administration.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the process of economization in fact helps the “lean state” model, which gives priority to public spending cuts, prevail over the “manager state” model, which requires investing in new instruments and developing new skills in business economics.

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<sup>31</sup> These observations are consistent with those made by Magdaléna Hadjiisky (2004) in the Czech case.

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