

**A Transfer-of-Ideas Approach to the History of Public Administration: The Hybridizations of Administrative Traditions**

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“The trends of American administration do not seem to have been greatly influenced by foreign experience.” Leonard White (cited in Waldo 2007 [1948], 39)

“Virtually every significant concept that existed in the American literature as late as 1937 had already been published in France” (Martin 1987, 297)

***Abstract***

*This chapter provides an overview of the transfer of ideas between German, French, and U.S. Public Administration during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on a wide range of primary sources from the three countries and contests the dominating perspective of path-dependent national silos in Public Administration theory. A largely uncontested assumption persists that the French, German, and U.S. intellectual traditions have followed distinct and separate ideational paths. However, evidence shows that these three classical administrative traditions have experienced significant exchanges and hybridizations. The chapter notably examines the question of the politics-administration dichotomy in the three countries, and offers a reflection on the changing conception of the trias politica across time. Going beyond a comparative perspective, this chapter applies a transfer-of-ideas approach and thus provides a theoretical framework for a transnational analysis of the circulation of administrative ideas. By analyzing the hybridity of administrative traditions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the chapter proposes a new approach to the history of ideas of Public Administration that is also relevant to the contemporary period. Learning from other traditions in no way is a new phenomenon and has happened before New Public Management entered the stage. Intellectual administrative traditions have long been hybrid and open for exogenous ideas.*

**Introduction: Acknowledging Hybridization Processes**

Public administrations are intimately related to the political system and history of each nation. As such, they are usually perceived as highly representative of the institutional specificities of a country. This perception is reflected in the scientific approach to public administration, which tends to focus on the specificities and distinctive features of national administrative traditions. Accordingly, national

administrative traditions are usually distinguished from each other according to a series of characteristics and classified along typologies. This approach reflects the historical reality of the construction of nation states across the centuries. However, an excessive focus on the specificities of national administrations tends to conceal important phenomena of transfer, exchange and hybridization actually taking place across nations. In contrast, analyzing this hybridity can shed a new light on the history of administration. We therefore apply a transfer-of-ideas approach that acknowledges the existing permeability between national traditions.<sup>1</sup> As will be shown, a closer look at the mutual inspirations on crucial aspects such as the separation of powers, checks and balances and the politics-administration dichotomy allows us to refine our conception of public administration.<sup>2</sup>

The borrowing of administrative ideas from one tradition to another does not occur without proper reappropriation of the imported notions. The way administrative ideas are reformulated during transfer processes is highly revealing of the characteristics of the importing administrative system, of the particular challenge that the conceptual transfer is intended to address and of the importer's perception of other systems. This opens the path to an in-depth study of so far under-explored aspects of public administrations, as a specific system can be well understood when considered in the context of its interactions with others. In examining the importation and adaptation processes of the circulated ideas, the transfer perspective allows both to examine how common concerns were addressed in different systems throughout history, and to study each country's specificities. This makes it a valuable and original way to understand the administrative phenomenon at the crossroads of national paths and international dialogue. The transfer-of-ideas approach is as relevant from a historical perspective as it is for understanding contemporary administrative processes.

The chapter is structured as follows: The next section presents a theoretical framework for a transfer-of-ideas approach to the history of administration. An application of this framework can demonstrate how administrative ideas circulated between the USA, France and Germany from the end of the 19th century to the 1970s. Finally, the implications of this approach for the broader study of public administrations are discussed before we turn to the concluding remarks.

### **Theoretical Framework: From a Comparative Approach to the Transfer-of-Ideas Framework**

The common perspective of comparative research on Public Administration is to regard national traditions as rather clear-cut and closed units of analysis. These distinct traditions are consequently analyzed as self-referential national units, in a path dependency perspective. This sense of national traditions originates in the effective and historical legacy that shapes every country as a cultural, social and politico-institutional unit at the macro-level (Bevir et al. 2003, 6; Yesilkagit 2010, 148). In fact, these historical legacies gave birth to different administrative models in praxis (e.g., the models of the Germanic, Napoleonic and Anglo-American administrations). Public Administration as a field of study further reflects these national institutional specificities. In particular, Continental European and US-American traditions of Public Administration are often considered to represent two highly different models, sometimes almost incomprehensible to each other (Stillman 1997, 337). The contrasting Public Administration narratives are derived from the assumptions of the "stateless" nature of the Anglo-Saxon administrative tradition and of the "stateness" nature of the European tradition. However, as this section shows, this perspective has tended to foreshadow a constant and crucial parameter of intellectual life, which is the transnational circulation of ideas. The transfer approach

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws from the authors' conceptual and empirical work published in Hurni (2014, 2015) ; Mavrot (2015 ; 2016) ; Mavrot et al. (2010) ; Rosser (2010, 2013) ; Rosser and Mavrot (2016) ; Sager and Rosser (2009) and Sager et al. (2012 ; 2018).

<sup>2</sup> We use the term "public administration" in lower case letter to apply to administrative practice, while "Public Administration" with capital letters refers to administrative studies.

challenges this perspective by examining crossbreeds between national traditions, thus shedding a new light on the history of Public Administration (Sager et al. 2018, 1).

Public Administration traditions as an object of research have been subject to wide discussions and in-depth analysis. It is useful to categorize different traditions into a typology, which helps sorting out a complex reality and mapping certain national trends. From a general perspective, the existence of national “traditional flavors” in administrative studies – i.e., specific ontological and epistemological assumptions in conceptualizing public administration (Rutgers, 2001) – is hardly disputed. Public Administration as a field of study takes place within a specific institutional context which is, to a larger degree, national (i.e., academic systems, administrative organizations) and constrains its orientations. However, each national field of study is a complex reality that shelters different sub-streams, each of which having specific analytical focus and orientations. Consequently, empirical reality challenges the very notion of tradition. Considering national traditions as closed and predefined units of analysis bears the risk of a tautological analysis, where the existence of national traditions is more presupposed than demonstrated. The transfer-of-ideas approach addresses this issue through an empirical and inductive exploration of the reality of such traditions (Sager et al. 2012). Instead of comparing different national units of analysis that are considered to have followed their own path, intersections are taken into account. Intellectual traditions are considered in light of their cross-breeding, which accounts for the international scientific dialogue that was, in fact, indissociable from the historical developments of Public Administration worldwide. As we will show, such transfers have given way to highly creative developments within each national administrative field, allowing importers to address specific issues from a new perspective or to overcome specific dilemmas (see below). The epistemic framework of the transfer-of-ideas perspective is illustrated in Table 2.1 below.

*Table 2.1: Differences between the logic of tradition and the logic of transfer*

	<b>Logic of tradition</b>	<b>Logic of the transfer of ideas</b>
Understanding of change	Incremental change (independence)	Mutual fertilization (interdependence)
Level of analysis	Macro-level	Micro-level
Epistemological approach	Deductive	Inductive
Logic of inference	Ideal-typical narrative	Historical-empirical narrative based on primary sources
Focus of interest	National paths	Road junctions

Source: Sager et al. 2018: 4.

As shown in Table 1, the transfer approach to the history of administrative ideas has fundamental epistemological, theoretical and methodological implications. Acknowledging the hybridization processes between intellectual traditions instead of considering them in their national specificities impacts the whole analytical process including the logic of inference, the line of questioning, and the level of analysis.

The body of scientific literature on cultural transfer is in line with this approach (e.g., Kaelble 2003; Suppanz 2006). This literature acknowledges both the existence of exchanges and connections among

different units (i.e., units that have become distinct subjects due to historical process) and the new products that emerge from these exchanges. Two specificities of approaches based on transfer must be underlined. First, the analytical focus lies on the importing culture, more specifically on its “webs of belief” (Bevir 2002). The meaning of the transfer for the importing author and the way it is translated in a new context are subject to close examination. As such, the analytical focus differs significantly from that of diffusion analyses, for instance, that look at the exporting culture, or at both sides – importers and exporters – to a similar extent. Second, the transfer approach focusses on the intentionality of the importer. Transfers are regarded as a deliberate action within the course of an intellectual process, and not as a fortuitous phenomenon deriving from a general diffusion process. In this sense, the transfer-of-ideas approach presented here does not focus on global converging trends but aims at closely examining the situation in which some scholars identify a solution to an intellectual dilemma in another tradition. The will or necessity to refine one’s intellectual tradition is identified as an important trigger for learning from others in the literature on cultural transfer (Lingelbach 2002; Middel 2000).

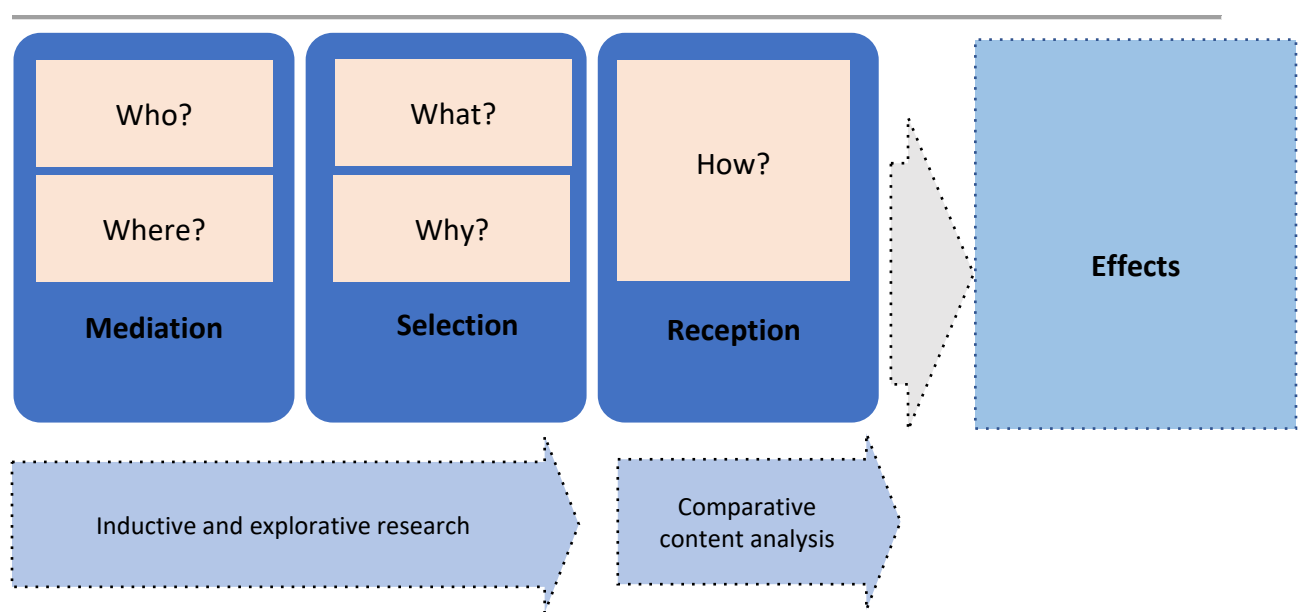
Furthermore, the transfer-of-ideas framework aligns with Mark Bevir’s approach to the history of ideas. In this perspective, administrative scholars are embedded in a cultural, intellectual and institutional context that informs their views and perceptions. It is this ideational context that we call “intellectual traditions”. However, although individuals are embedded in intellectual traditions, they are nevertheless considered as “agents who can extend, modify, even transform, the traditions that provided the background to their initial webs of belief” (Bevir 2002, 191). This is believed to be especially the case when these individuals face a *dilemma* with regard to which a new approach is required (Bevir 2002, 200). Following James Farr, we can distinguish two main types of dilemmas: “internal ones, presented by a particular intellectual tradition; or they may be external ones, presented by the outside world of politics” (Farr 1995, 135).

Consequently, we expect to be able to explain changes made to intellectual traditions (i.e., changes in the ideational path) by looking at internal dilemmas, which are inherent to a given tradition, according to Farr, and external dilemmas, which fall within the scope of broader sociopolitical events. These two types of dilemmas are often intimately linked. The transfer framework aims at understanding the way administrative scholars face and address such dilemmas. This approach therefore challenges a purely comparative one: Evidence of transfers used to solve internal and external dilemmas highlights the empirical reality of hybridization among national intellectual paths. A further conceptual distinction must be made in this regard. As stated in the introduction, interactions between different ideational paths do not always occur in cases of pure adoption of an idea from another tradition. A substantial part of intellectual dialogue among traditions lies in the critical discussion of foreign concepts in order to partially or completely reject them. Such interactions also frequently go with more or less extensive modifications of the transferred knowledge (Middel 2000, 21). The two ideal types of importation or reception processes can therefore be categorized as adoption and rejection, with a wide range of intermediate situations existing between these two ends of the continuum. The theoretical reflection of the transfer approach on this wide range of importation types thus helps us refine our understanding of the notion of intellectual traditions (Sager et al. 2012, 136-137; Sager et al. 2018, 10-12).

Figure 2.1 proposes a process in three analytical steps to apply the transfer-of-ideas approach to the selected body of sources (Sager et al. 2018, 12). The three steps of the transfer are the mediation, the selection and the reception. We argue that these three steps enable accounting for the transfer process and understanding its meaning and wider implications for the importing tradition. First, the *mediation* step relates to the question of who is operating a transfer, from both the individual and institutional point of view. This analytical step deals with the “who” and “where” questions and acknowledges the situation and the perspective from which the transfer takes place. Second, the *selection* step

investigates what ideas, concepts or discourses are being transferred among traditions (i.e., the “what” question). This analytical step includes the examination of the reasons leading to a transfer (the “why” question). It should be noted that equally important is the question of what is not being transferred depending on the needs of the importing actors, which the notion of *selection* accounts for. To be able to identify the relevant aspects pertaining to these analytical steps (who is transferring what, for what reasons and from which position), a highly inductive and exploratory research strategy is required. Identifying a scholarly transfer and being able to properly contextualize and analyze it require the exploration of a wide body of sources. Third, we define the *reception* as the process through which the imported notion is transferred and received into the importing tradition. In fact, examining the transfer process includes analyzing the exact way the imported idea is integrated within the existing “web of belief” (Bevir 2002) of the importing tradition; this step addresses the “how” question (Lüsebrink 2001, 215-217). The analytical steps of the transfer framework are schematized in Figure 1 below.

*Figure 2.1: Analytical model of the transfer-of-ideas approach*



Source: Sager et al. 2018: 12.

### **Case Studies: The Internal Complexity of US, French and German Public Administrations**

In this section, we employ the theoretical framework to the study of the transfer of administrative ideas between the USA, France and Germany during the late nineteenth and the 20th century until the economic crisis of the early 1970s.

#### *A transatlantic transfer-of-ideas perspective on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*

The development of the transfer-of-ideas theoretical framework is based on a research on the history of Public Administration as a field of study in the USA, France and Germany (Sager et al. 2012; 2018). These three countries were chosen as paradigmatic examples of Continental European and Anglo-American traditions of Public Administration (Kickert and Stillman 1999; Painter and Peters 2010; Rohr 1992; Rutgers 2001). In this study, we adopted a transatlantic perspective, focused on the exchanges between these three administrative traditions. The time frame of the study was from the end of the 19th century up to the beginning of the 1970s. In the existing literature, several studies have

provided insights into part of the history of Public Administration in France and Germany (e.g., Chevallier 1986; Ihl et al. 2003; Payre 2006; Saunier 2003; Vanneuville 2003 for France; Bogumil and Jann 2009; Jann 2003; 2009; 2011; Seibel 1982, 1996 for Germany). Regarding the USA, scholars usually agree on the fact that North-American Public Administration has a “poor understanding of its own history” (Luton 1999, 210; cf. Adams 1992, 368; Miewald 1994, 323-324; Raadschelders et al. 2000; Spicer 2004, 359).

Hence, a comprehensive study of their historical development still remains to be done, and we also lack an understanding of the mutual influences between the three traditions. Sager et al.’s (2018) study aimed at contributing to fill these gaps based on an original body of primary sources pertaining to the history of Public Administration in these three countries. The analysis was twofold. We retraced the historical development of each national path in the first place to identify the importance and the meaning of transfers within each country in the second step. One of the analytical focuses was on the debates about the place of public administration within the constitutional order and about the balance between the legislative, executive and judiciary branches (Hurni 2015; Rosser and Mavrot 2016). In sum, Sager et al. (2018) identify nine principal transfers of administrative ideas during the study period as shown in table 2.2.

*Table 2.2 Nine transatlantic transfers of administrative ideas between 1870 and 1970*

No.	What	When	From	To
1	Hegelian organic state philosophy	End of 19th century	Germany	USA
2	Fayol’s scientific management	Early 20th century	France	USA
3	Technocracy	Inter-war period	USA	Germany
4	Public Administration as a discipline	Immediate post-WWII	USA	France
5	Politics–administration dichotomy / democratic government	Post-WWII	USA	Germany
6	Administrative productivity	Post-WWII	USA	France
7	K.W. Deutsch’s cybernetics	1960s	USA	Germany
8	Weber’s theory of bureaucracy	Post-WWII	Germany	USA
9	Organizational behaviorism / social psychology	1960s/1970s	USA	France

Source: Sager et al. 2018: 132.

In the following, we briefly expose some examples of circulations and transfers between Public Administration in the three countries that we analyzed in our study on the transatlantic transfer of administrative ideas.

#### *Early US Public Administration and its European inspirations*

The American case is highly interesting because while having strongly inspired France and Germany in the development of their administrative science after World War II, early American Public Administration at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries actually relied on European authors. Prominent scholars of the early American Public Administration, like Woodrow Wilson and Frank Goodnow, were influenced by Hegelian theories (Miewald 1984; Overeem 2010; Rohr 2003; Sager and Rosser 2009; Spicer 1995). In particular, these authors from the Progressive

movement found inspiring insights in the Hegelian organic state philosophy regarding pressing political issues the USA was facing at the time. In fact, in the late 19th century, the country was facing increasing problems that derived from the rapid industrialization of society – such as changes in the social structure, poverty and urbanization. At the same time, its political organization, characterized by clientelism and the spoils system, was unable to cope with these issues. The Hegelian notion of organic state functions offered a way to theoretically address the corruption problem by allowing conceptualization of administration as a state organ on its own, distinct from politics and pursuing its own tasks. In this way, an effective administration dealing with its duties and protected from corrupted politics could be theorized. Following this, the politics-administration dichotomy became one of the core notions of American Public Administration (Rosser 2010; 2013).

This example shows that not only the importation of concepts from one tradition to another is important, but also that the exchange of ideas between administrative traditions can be circular: countries mutually inspire each other during different historical periods. While some European ideas were used in the USA to consolidate American Public Administration, European scholars later drew attention to the well-advanced US Public Administration literature in order to develop the study of administration in their countries. This example also shows the close entanglement between socio-political and scientific considerations, as the scholarly transfer of ideas was triggered by the will to address societal issues. Scientific transfers undertaken under such circumstances are aimed at resolving what we call a historical dilemma (see section “Discussion”).

#### *France and the American reference: Moving away from administrative law*

As to French administrative studies, it is striking that the American reference has repeatedly been used to challenge the dominant tradition of administrative law. While administrative law had managed to monopolize the study of administration during the 19th and until the mid-20th century in France (Chevallier 1986; Vanneuville 2003), calls for a complementary perspective on the study of administration strongly emerged in the immediate aftermath of World War II. A movement drew on the US example to propose the creation of a *science administrative* that would renew French administrative studies. The founders of this discipline were comparative public law scholars willing to extend the study of public administration beyond its juridical features, to wider social, political and institutional aspects (Mavrot et al. 2010). They attempted to create a new academic discipline and heavily relied on the general example of American Public Administration to demonstrate the feasibility of this project. Their final aim was to create a supranational administrative science that would provide a common frame for enforcing fundamental rights and promote worldwide peace through mutual understanding and the convergence of national legal systems (Cassin 1968).

To say the least, this was a challenge in the Cold War context. In another perspective, a group of French reformist high-level civil servants also relied on the American example after World War II to criticize the dominance of legal instruments and procedures within French administration (Milhaud 1954). Their agenda was to introduce productivity techniques within the French administration, considered to be inefficient because of its legalistic functioning. The Technical Institute of Public Administration was created in 1947, which abundantly imported and diffused American literature on administrative rationalization (Mavrot 2016). Finally, at a later point in time, the well-known sociologist Michel Crozier imported American behavioral approaches into French administrative studies in order to substantiate his criticism of the dominant juridical approach to administration (Mavrot 2015). He extensively relied on the work of James J. March and Herbert Simon to construct his sociology of organization framework, which adopted a new perspective centered on informal individual behavior within administrative units instead of focusing on formal rules (Crozier 1969).

The French case shows the malleability of the reference to a foreign “tradition”, which can be appropriated by a very diverse set of actors to serve their purposes. In this context, the American example fulfilled several tasks: showing that the foundation of a proper administrative science distinct from law was possible, importing new paradigms such as productivism within administrative praxis or opening the path to new theoretical approaches in the academic field. Consequently, depending on the importers’ interests, the transfer of ideas might take various forms, from the broad invocation of a general model to follow to applied administrative recipes or epistemological orientations.

#### *American Public Administration as a continuous inspiration for Germany*

Germany’s inspiration of concepts and theories from the US was constant and took place at various moments of the country’s history. Like in France, German authors cited American Public Administration to contest the predominance of public law in administrative studies and to promote an approach that would be more centered on political aspects. However, this happened earlier than in France, already at the beginning of the 20th century. During the interwar period, there was then a strong focus on scientific management in Germany. The technocracy movement widely imported and translated the related American literature, with the declared idea of improving the state’s efficiency (Hurni 2015). It should be noted that in parallel, the USA had itself shown a great interest in the writings of the French author Henri Fayol, as a complement to Taylorism (Pearson 1945, 80). This shows the truly transnational nature of the circulation of administrative ideas, enriching each tradition with different layers of importations and translations.

In the post-World War II era, administrative studies were concerned with re-democratization after the fall of the National-Socialist Regime. German authors imported US publications and rediscovered the politics-administration dichotomy, which had had a German inspiration for the American Public Administration scholars at the end of the 19th century. In postwar Germany, the dichotomy was seen as a means of conceptualizing administration as an actor of the politico-institutional system on its own rather than as the pure instrument of the executive’s will, as it had been up to its extreme during the Nazi period. Returning from his exile to the USA, Fritz Morstein-Marx was especially active in conceptualizing administration as a distinct phenomenon from politics within early postwar German administrative science, relying on American Progressive Public Administration (1958; 1959). This opened the door for the study of administration as a subject of investigation for sociology and political science. Later on, the dichotomy was rejected by these disciplines as over simplistic and neither theoretically nor empirically valid. This led to a dominance of more holistic approaches such as by political cybernetics or the Neo-Verwaltungswissenschaft (Hurni 2015).

The German case shows how a foreign example can serve as a source of inspiration at very different times, at the service of a great variety of purposes. Germany’s specific historical trajectory within Europe made it rely on some streams of US Public Administration to reject the predominance of administrative law, pursuing objectives of state efficiency or accomplishing a political project of democratization. It also highlights the circular nature of transfer processes, which might involve a chain of different countries rather than being limited to a one-to-one transfer (i.e., the case of the scientific management, involving the USA, France and Germany), or involving back-and-forth processes between two countries (i.e., the politics-administration dichotomy). Specific historico-political events such as the de-Nazification process that Germany underwent after the war require a radically new conceptualization of the state, thus allowing for the rediscovering of forgotten notions such as the politics-administration dichotomy.



## Discussion: Supranational Crossroads and National Specificities

As our in-depth study of sources pertaining to the history of US Public Administration, French *sciences administratives* and German *Verwaltungswissenschaften* suggests, the notion of national traditions as closed units of study does not stand the empirical validity test. Although having heuristic value in helping to depict the dominant orientation of each country's intellectual tradition, "national traditions" appear to be highly complex realities bringing together different sub-streams of studies. In other words, French and German technocratic streams of Public Administration might, for instance, have more in common with their American counterparts than with other national subfields that are closer to administrative law. Although respectively focusing on very different administrative realities at the national level, their common epistemological approach to administration brings some national subfields closer together. Undoubtedly, it can be stated that paradigms and concepts did circulate among nations during our study period, leading to important hybridization phenomena. This invites us to take a closer look at the transfer itself, including the actors who initiate it, their rationale for circulating ideas and the adoption, adaptation or rejection of imported concepts. In this context, the notion of national tradition is too reified to account for this complex reality. Departing the analysis from a paradigmatic national path would be presupposing the results rather than empirically studying the complex dynamics that occur within each unit of analysis. The transfer-of-ideas approach, centered on hybridization processes, can therefore enrich comparative Public Administration.

By shifting the focus to supranational cross-breeding, a fresh look can be taken at the history of administrative ideas. Examining how foreign ideas can serve as a resource when imported in another context (Landrin 2006, 220-221) allows for a refined understanding of the ongoing discussions within each country. In this regard, the transfer approach does not only highlight what happens at the supranational level when ideas are circulating. Through the transfer approach's focus on the importation process, it also shows what happens within every national context when new concepts are required to solve specific dilemmas (Bevir 2002, 200). The translation processes that transferred ideas go through during the importation reveal the different ways administration is conceived in each country and how the study of administration is structured: what are its purposes, what are the ongoing debates within the academic field and what specific challenges do Public Administration as a field of study and public administration in the praxis face. The aspects can be well analyzed when looking at the adaptation requirements of an imported idea. To carry out this analysis, the transfer-of-ideas framework proposes studying a series of questions relevant to the importation process: *who* is undertaking a transfer and from *where* (i.e., mediation), *what* is selected to be transferred and *why* (i.e., selection) and *how* is the imported notion being transferred in a continuum ranging from adoption to adaptation and rejection (i.e., reception). In this sense, the transnational circulation of ideas always says a lot about what happens at the domestic level (Saunier 2004, 142-143). Therefore, we state that the transfer approach enables examination of both the *crossroads* between different national fields of study and their respective *specificities*.

Finally, the transfer-of-ideas framework is equally relevant for the praxis, and some lessons can be learned from the findings generated in our study. First, if the borrowing of a new idea from another context is intended to solve a dilemma, it also often reveals the existence of conflicts and disagreements within the importer's field of study. The transferred idea is used as a resource within an interpretative struggle about what Public Administration is and should be. In this context, external examples can serve as authority arguments and be used to consolidate the position of the importer within its own field. Crozier's attempt to import behavioral theories to the French study of administration or the transfer of productivity paradigms within a French administrative context largely dominated by the legalistic approach of administrative law provide good examples of such

mechanisms. Second, we can distinguish three necessary conditions for a successful transfer, i.e., a transfer that will trigger an effective learning process within the importing unit: 1) the need for a new concept or approach aimed at solving a problem or resolving a dilemma, be it a praxis or an intellectual dilemma; 2) importing actor(s) and a related supportive network to diffuse the idea; and 3) a possibility of institutionalization for the transferred idea, i.e., its intellectual canonization or its institutional embedment within praxis, which will allow it to last over time. Third, three main categories of transfer were identified. The first type of transfers aims at resolving a historical dilemma, regarding a political or social issue. The second type of transfer is driven by academic considerations from a professional group and serves the development of a scientific discipline, notably by contributing to establishing its boundaries. The third type of transfer can be depicted as pertaining to the pure internal logic of the scientific process and is driven by theoretical or methodological considerations. These categories are ideal-types, and the three of them might also be closely entangled within the same transfer process (Sager et al. 2018, 138-145, 151-152).

### **Concluding Remarks: A Transfer Approach to Move Beyond the National Traditions Perspective**

We have underlined the benefits of adopting a transfer approach to the history of Public Administration. This approach accounts for the hybridization processes that have marked the history of Public Administration, while at the same time acknowledging the crucial importance of intellectual and institutional contexts at the national level. The transfer-of-ideas framework takes these two aspects into account by focusing on the exchanges between traditions while also analyzing their meaning for the importing actors within their proper national context.

The empirical validity of the notion of national traditions might be even more challenged today than in the timeframe covered by our study. The notion of national traditions of Public Administration might be further blurred in today's interconnected world. It is all the more important to question the national nature of administrative studies at a time when medium-range theories aimed at formulating generalizable observations on administrative behavior have flourished in the social sciences, to say the least. However, our study also showed the importance of remaining prudent with the pretention to formulate universal recipes, which must instead find intellectual resonance and institutional anchorage to make their way within each national context. For these reasons, it is safe to assume that the debate on "traditional flavors" (Rutgers, 2001) will remain on the contemporary Public Administration research agenda in the near future.

The transfer of ideas approach has important implications for the comparative study of Public Administration. Traditions change over time and hence cannot serve as explanatory variables for national differences in practice (Sager et al. 2018, 150-151). The recipients transform imported ideas. Consequently, administrative paradigms rather than overall national traditions may serve as variables for comparative research. The notion of hybridization, analyzed from an empirical and inductive perspective, provides a valuable heuristic entry point to conceptualize Public Administration at the crossroads of national contexts and global exchanges.

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