

***The Power and Importance of the State after the Global Economic Crisis in
Relation to the Concept of Neo-Weberian State***

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Abstract

As a result of the economic crisis started in 2007-2008 the public began to look longingly in the direction of the state. Pushed aside by the dominant model of the New Public Management and the critique of bureaucratic administration, it suddenly became a lifeline for failing banks and other financial institutions. The society and the growing group of researchers began to see the need to restore the power of the state.

One of the most widely discussed proposals in recent years was the concept of the Neo-Weberian State developed by Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert . The authors present the concept of combining the best elements of the New Public Management (e.g. the professionalization of public services and focus on goals rather than procedures) and the Max Weber's Bureaucratic Model (e.g. the role of the state as the main coordinator of solutions for new global problems).

In this article the author analyzes the reasons for increase of expectations with respect to the state. At the same time the author presents the reforms carried out in selected countries that are consistent with the model of the Neo-Weberian State. This issue is particularly important in connection with the greatly limited resources at state's disposal as a result of the neoliberal reforms and above all, globalized financial markets. So the question arises, whether the model proposed by Pollitt and Bouckaert is able to meet this challenge? How the states should be reformed in order to avoid copying the negative elements of the old models?

Keywords: Neo-Weberian State, administration, New Public Management, public services, reforms.

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Introduction

At the end of the first decade of the 21st c., as a result of the turmoil in the global markets, we were faced with the spectre of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Recession of 1929-1933. The crisis, originally initiated by the collapse of the mortgage market in the United States, quickly spread out to more countries, causing significant perturbations on a global scale.

As a result of the economic crisis and the on-going debate on its causes, many experts and politicians were prompted to initiate a discussion on the need to redefine the role a state should play in a modern economy. Relegated to the role of an observer taking care of ensuring the most favourable conditions for the "invisible hand of the market", it did not have sufficient capacity to prevent the growth of a speculative bubble, amidst the growing fear of potential allegations anticipated to be hurled at it by the free-market advocates. After the economic meltdown, declining financial institutions began to look imploringly in the direction of the state for support (Barofsky 2012).

Public outcry and some experts contributed to an increase in general sentiment for extending the regulatory role of the state, as well as changing the way it actually operates. In terms of the theory of public administration this translated into a critical assessment of the currently dominant model of New Public Management, as deviating far too much from the original vision of administration, as put forward by Max Weber. An attempt to have these two approaches fused, with a view to ultimately extracting from them the most effective solutions, was undertaken by Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert, who proposed the concept of a Neo-Weberian State (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). Considering a growing interest in this theory, the Author shall strive to present the ways in which some solutions deemed compatible with this theory have been implemented in selected countries, against the background of the Global Economic Crisis.

In the first part of the paper the Author shall briefly address the origins and effects of the Global Economic Crisis at the end of the first decade of the 21st c., which proved tangibly instrumental in having the existing models of the economy and the state revised.

In the second part the Author shall outline the key assumptions of the concept of the Neo-Weberian State, as put forward by Pollitt and Bouckaert in their book *Public Management Reform. A comparative analysis of New Public Management, governance, and the Neo-Weberian State* (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). The main emphasis shall rest on demonstrating the differences between this model and the currently dominant ones.

The third part shall address the reforms, either planned or actually carried out in recent years, that actually happen to fall well within the conceptual scope of the proposed model of the Neo-Weberian State. Those reforms shall be explicated on the US and EU turf, respectively. This shall facilitate a preliminary assessment whether the proposal presented by Pollitt and Bouckaert is actually reflected in the actions undertaken by the policy makers.

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The Global Economic Crisis as the result of a weakened role of a state

In terms of its geographical origins, the Global Economic Crisis should be attributed to the United States, where in the 1980s the process of gradual deregulation of the financial and banking sector commenced. This culminated in the adoption of the bill on the modernization of the financial services sector in 1999 (i.e. The Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act), actually allowing for any mergers of financial institutions, which in due course turned out to be rather fateful. At the same time the US government was largely responsible for stimulating the mortgage market, actually motivating the financial institutions to offer credit facilities also to the indigent citizens, inter alia through corporate entities like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (Beck & Mozdzeń 2011).

In public awareness real estate property has become one of the safest and also the most profitable ways of investment for the future. Persons which have so far avoided the risks and entrusted their money to the banks as the time deposits, or put their trust in the alternative, yet relatively safe financial instruments, began to respond to overall euphoria ruling the market. The financial sector, much driven by its paramount desire to maximize the profits at whatever it took, quickly spotted an opportunity to gain substantial benefits to be derived from the strong demand for real estate property. It is for this very reason that the banks and the mushrooming financial institutions loosened up their stringent requirements on the borrowers that did not boast sufficient capacity to take on such a substantial commitment.

Financial institutions have begun to recognize the problem of having in their portfolios a steadily growing share of loans that did not bode well (i.e. offer good prospects) for the future. Bank staff put in charge of managing those risks came up with the idea of converting the danger of losing solvency by their customers into an extra profit. The receivables due from the defaulted mortgages began to be combined into packages and subsequently sold off to any potentially interested parties. In order to improve overall credibility of these products the audit companies granted them their certificates with a positive credit rating. Over time, these derivatives grew to become so complex in their structure that very few people were actually able to understand what in fact they were buying, and - even more importantly - what sort of risks were entailed in such a purchase.

Despite the warning signals starting to appear with regard to the prices on the real estate market which seemed to be rising at an alarming rate, those had been downplayed to a large extent. As a result, in 2007, there finally was a collapse of the mortgage loans market in the United States. The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers a year later, and the sale of the shares of Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch banks at the surprisingly low prices caused a widespread panic and overall financial crisis, which quickly spread further afield from the United States, causing massive turbulences on the international arena. In the era of globalization and spreading of McWorld, as pointed out by B. Barber, all financial markets in fact make up a closed system of interconnected vessels. If one of the markets should break down, the crisis will rapidly spread out to another, causing the entire system to be affected in no time at all (Barber, 2008).

Analyzing the above referenced course of events it might well be concluded that one of the main causes of the Global Economic Crisis were the animal spirits, whose existence in the economy was pointed out by J. M. Keynes, while with regard to the crises of the recent decades this was also recalled by G. Akerlof and R. Schiller (Akerlof & Schiller 2009). In their view, they can be divided into the five aspects of animal instincts that have contributed to the collapse of the financial system. These are:

1) Confidence and its multipliers. One of the reasons that speculative bubbles appear is due to the excessive confidence of the market players. On the one hand, we are dealing with financial institutions that offer assurances of financial security and an absence of any risk related to the specific services offered by them, while on the other, potential customers who put their trust in professional competence of financial advisors and analysts. Faith built on such shaky foundations may only too easily turn into panic, though. When a strong market slump occurs, it is bound to have the trust seriously undermined, as well as become instrumental in radically transforming the society's prevalent moods.

2) Fairness. This factor is directly linked to the previous one. The persons who bought toxic debt securities had trust in overall integrity of the representatives of financial institutions. Additional premise behind these instruments were the actual ratings issued by the independent (at least in theory) audit firms. A sense of justice clearly made itself felt even after the outbreak of the crisis, when general public actually held a pretty negative view of subsidizing the failing banks out of the public funds.

3) Corruption and bad faith. Creative accounting, corruption and other types of conduct in bad faith make up the other elements of everyday life embraced by some of the giants of financial industry which came to light during the economic downturn and contributed to their downfall. Even though it seemed that a relatively recent Enron debacle would become a warning to potential followers, in reality a powerful temptation to make a fast buck became just all too strong to be resisted.

4) Money illusion. G. Akerlof and R. Schiller point out that contrary to classical theories, people usually perceive the nominal and not the real value of money. We are faced with such an approach, inter alia, when concluding contracts of employment, credit agreements, buying bonds, or in accounting.

5) Stories. The decisions actually made by the people are substantially impacted by the tales that have come to their attention. Every day we learn the new anecdotes, which we are only too eager to share with others. Passed from mouth to mouth over time they become increasingly detached from reality. They can contribute both to spreading euphoria and pessimism, thus increasing the swings in public sentiment, i.e. either facilitating a growth of the speculative bubble, or instilling blind panic in the public.

One of the principal causes of these aspects of animal spirits coming to the fore, which also fit in perfectly with the current situation, is deemed a weakening role of the state as a market regulator. Both in the case of the United States, as well as Europe, a decisive intervention of public institutions proved absolutely necessary. On the one hand, the private banks expected financial support from the state, while on the other, the society was opposed to the financing of failing financial entities, generally

associated with unbridled greed and looking after their own interests only, out of the public taxes. Therefore, in order to reconcile the interests of both sides, it was necessary to make changes in the perception of a financial market at large, which would effectively preclude similar cases, whereupon animal spirits would effectively hijack common sense.

The Concept of the Neo-Weberian State

The concept of the Neo-Weberian State is relatively new and its definition is not yet firmly established in the literature. This concept originally appeared in the domain of social sciences, where the state was perceived as a process whose shape was determined by the external factors. The key publication in terms of popularising this trend is the work of C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert *Public Management Reform A Comparative Analysis - New Public Management, Governance, and the Neo-Weberian State*. The authors present the concept of the Neo-Weberian State in terms of the functioning of a state, as well as the modernization processes taking place within public administration. This publication provides the foundation for further exploration of this paradigm, and it is the one to which most of the cited authors actually refer.

The Neo-Weberian State may be defined as the state whose functioning is effectively underpinned by the Weberian model of public administration, updated with the elements of New Public Management and governance. Such a state functions on the basis of eight principles - the first four are derived from Max Weber's bureaucratic traditions, while the remaining ones are borrowed from the concept of New Public Management and New Public Governance:

1. The centrality of a state - the role of the main coordinator of activities aimed at solving the problems of global nature (e.g. environmental hazards, aging population, etc.).
2. Reform and enforcement of administrative law - it should play a key role in the modernization of the basic principles shaping up the relationship citizen - state.
3. Retaining the concept of public service - maintaining the elements that are characteristic for it, e.g. status, culture, and organizational principles.
4. Representative democracy - the basis for legitimacy at all levels of government administration.
5. Focus on the citizens - abandonment of the focus on the internal rules and procedures, characteristic of the Weberian approach, in favour of the focus shifted onto catering for the needs and expectations of the external players.
6. Additional public consultations and direct involvement of the citizens - supplementation of the representative democracy with the instruments facilitating active public participation within the scope of activities undertaken by the state.
7. Focus on the results - the need to change the way administration resources are managed, so that officials are held accountable primarily on the basis of the results actually achieved, rather than being assessed in terms of their compliance with applicable procedures.
8. Professional management - training the officials to become professional managers who can effectively address and meet the needs of the citizens (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011).

According to C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert, the combination of the best elements of the Weberian approach and New Public Management should contribute to the creation of an efficient, modern state well capable of effectively addressing the needs of its citizens. Even though at first glance the key assumptions seem to be correct in the utmost, some issue was taken with the perspective they adopted with regard to the reforms. Such an approach was put forward by W. Dunn and D. Miller, who claimed that the concept of the Neo-Weberian State (as well as New Public Management) was indeed a vast territory, flawed with numerous ambiguities, and generally leaving quite a lot to imagination.

It tends to ignore the mixed or clearly inefficient results achieved by the organizations managed in line with its principles. It embodies the technical-utilitarian perspective, in most aspects reminiscent of instrumental rationality espoused by Max Weber, which he had highlighted, criticized, and was clearly afraid of, as it could prove instrumental in curtailing democracy and individual civil liberties. Both New Public Management and the Neo-Weberian State ignore other forms and contexts of rationality that are relevant to administrative reform in the democracies (Dunn & Miller, 2007, p. 352-353).

Weaknesses of the Neo-Weberian model are also recognized by L. Lynn. His criticism is mainly resultant from a negative attitude towards the models generalizing the evolution of the administration. As a result, they misrepresent the actual picture of the process of reforming the public administration system. Lynn justifies this by way of emphasising the importance of local cultural factors that are rather hard to be included in this particular approach to theoretical modelling. The differences encountered between the respective administrative cultures modify both the process itself, and the results obtained through its application. That is why creating general models in line with the one-size-fits-all principle is so hazardous, and actually poses a tangible threat to liberal democracy. This risk is actually embedded within the very process of having the classical model of bureaucratic organization modified (Lynn 2008).

These criticisms are not fully justified, however, as C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert point out that in practice there is no such thing as a comprehensive reform of the state, or the actual modus of its operation. We always have to deal with a string of scattered activities carried out by many players. There is no single leader and no single vision (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). In this way they imply that the models of the Neo-Weberian State, New Public Management or New Public Governance may not be treated as rigidly structured, ready-made solutions.

Despite the criticism, however, L. Lynn takes due note of the reasons why reforming the dominant model of New Public Management is necessary, and the solutions aimed at increasing the role of the state steadily gain popularity. New Public Management promoted by global capitalism may be sensitive to democratic forces, because it lacks social legitimacy - the concept of citizens, their civil rights and participation is almost non-existent within the debate addressing this issue. Under the influence of discontent increasingly more frequently voiced by the electorate in some countries, some attention has eventually been paid towards the reforms aimed at having the actual scope of participation of their citizens extended.

L. Lynn concludes that the Neo-Weberian State model offers interesting opportunities both in terms of theoretical considerations and the actual implementation of public policies. In his view, the reform of public management falls primarily within a national domain. In a world of globalization the state's response to social changes will take place in a similar manner until the society resolves that it is high time the fundamental changes be implemented. At this point, not only the instruments wielded by the state, but also its functions shall become the subject of evaluation (Lynn 2008).

The literature on the subject also offers some analyses focusing on the European turf. M. Potůček believes that modern European states are Neo-Weberian in character, as they combine classical Weberian model with the new solutions in the field of management. Thus he believes the concept of the Neo-Weberian State to be the currently functioning system, and not the paradigm of governance or a management model (Potůček 2008). On the other hand, W. Drechsler actually deems the Neo-Weberian State to be the hope for the old continent. Certain elements of this approach are detected by him in the activities of the EU administration. In his view, at the European Union level we are faced with the process of departing from New Public Management and returning both to the values and the framework of reference offered by Max Weber's classical bureaucracy (Drechsler 2008).

T. Randma-Liiv believes that this paradigm may offer the right solution for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, allowing to achieve a compromise in the area of key values, very much of importance for modern and efficient administration, i.e. flexibility and stability (Randma-Liiv 2008). L. Matei and S. Flogaitis write in a similar vein, recognising the Neo-Weberian model as the only solution in the era of post-New Public Management, representing a synthesis between legalism and managerialism (Matei & Flogaitis 2011).

From the review of literature on the subject there emerges a concept of the Neo-Weberian State as a response to the problems arising from the "hollow state". This situation stems both from the on-going globalisation process and the ensuing blurring of the borders, as well as the growing importance of the international corporations. The weakening role of the state, caused by the steadily advancing processes of decentralisation, and the emergence of supranational bodies like the European Union which deprived the Member states part of their autonomy, is not deemed without a significance either.

Let us now examine to what extent the solution proposed by C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert can help counteract the factors that contributed to the outbreak of the Global Economic Crisis. As a starting point, let us assume the examples of animal spirits, as represented by G. Akerlof and R. Schiller:

1) Confidence and its Multipliers.

A well-functioning state, based on the cadre of highly qualified officials intent on carrying out public tasks, should inspire the public's confidence and become the guarantor of respecting the principles governing the financial markets. In the event of excessive euphoria and rapidly growing speculative bubbles, the state should take specific measures aimed at cooling down the economy, whereas in the event of incipient escalation of panic, the ones aimed at calming down the raging emotions by strengthening overall supervision over the financial institutions. Being aware that a

strong state actually takes care of their vital interests, the citizens will react with much more calm to the unexpected collapses on the financial markets.

2) Fairness.

In order to ensure this element it is also necessary to ensure the functioning of the competent supervisory state authorities, operating well in line with the effectively structured administrative law. The prospect of being inevitably held accountable to the public institutions endorsed by society should be an important factor in curtailing any illegal practices, as pursued by some financial institutions.

3) Corruption and bad faith.

Like the sense of justice and fairness the experience of the Global Economic Crisis demonstrates that the institutions tasked with controlling the market players are essential in order to effectively prevent creative accounting, corruption and other anti-social behaviour. While trying to deal with this problem, it is essential to ensure that the approach of the officials is actually focused on the expectations of the citizens, as well as effective communication, i.e. informing the citizens on all the measures being actually adopted, as this may also tangibly contribute to the development of overall trust and legitimacy.

4) Money illusion.

As regards the juxtaposition of the nominal vs. the real value of money, the only reasonable solution seems to consist in having the society properly educated, in conjunction with the adequately structured legislation. Competent clerical staff may be of some help in this respect, just as long as it strives to cooperate with the public, while in the event of making the new law, seeks to take into account the real value of money, thus at the same time representing the vital interests of the citizens.

5) Stories.

With respect to the last of the factors characterizing the animal spirits, it should be duly noted at this juncture that the state happens to be one of the most competent institutions in spinning the tales. It may shift the centre of gravity, e.g. from the narrative of efficient markets, to the narrative of social values, economic inequality, the plight of the working class, and the nature of civic society. It should therefore be borne in mind how big a role in the case of the tale-spinning is played by all sorts of anecdotes and rumours that tend to spread very easily in a world of global social networks, mass media, and self-appointed experts boasting a strong influence over public opinion. It may only be hoped that the professionalization of public administration and citizens' active involvement in the operations pursued by it would help control potential consequences resultant from passing on such tales.

The reforms after the Global Economic Crisis and the concept of the Neo-Weberian State

This section shall address the extent to which the reforms implemented over the past few years in response to the Global Economic Crisis actually fit in with the concept of the Neo-Weberian State, in due consideration of the eight key principles, as outlined earlier on. In view of the vastness of this particular issue, the focus rests on the specific measures undertaken by the United States and the European Union.

The United States, as the cradle of the current economic crisis, were faced with the task of bringing the economic collapse under control as soon as possible. Given the previously pursued policies, whereupon high priority was given to ensuring a minimum possible intervention in the markets, thereby ensuring free competition, having this situation altered was extremely hard to accomplish in the view espoused by those in power. Under the pressure of public opinion, both in the United States, as well as on the international scene, the decisive steps were ultimately decided to be taken. A legislative bill passed in 2010 introduced the most significant changes in the financial sector for more than three decades. On the one hand, this reform introduced additional regulations on mortgage lending and the transactions in derivatives, while on the other, it introduced brand-new solutions with regard to the supervision of the corporate bodies involved in the actual pursuit of such activities.

From the perspective of the Neo-Weberian State, it is this last element that is particularly noteworthy. The creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the appointment of a special team of regulators, reporting directly to the US Treasury, tasked with determining the type of collateral required from the banks, fit in perfectly with the key assumptions of the model proposed by C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert. They demonstrate the quest to have the role of a state as the central coordinator of measures aimed at combating the crisis appreciably increased, endorse the importance of the reform of currently applicable administrative law (a reference to the principles of a Neo-Weberian state model, as derived directly from Max Weber), as well as for representing the interests of the external players, or the professionalization of managers (the reference to the key precepts of the Neo-Weberian State, as directly derived from New Public Management and New Public Governance).

In this case, these are mainly the vital interests of the citizens, but also those of properly functioning financial institutions, which have become the other victims of the economic collapse, even though indirectly so. Despite the revolution introduced by this reform, it is worth noting that in fact the changes were intended to have been much more radical, although a strong lobbying response from Wall Street ultimately prevented this from happening. This only highlights the extent to which the role of the state has been weakened by the decades of New Public Management model in operation. Prospective restoration of the dominant role of the state will still require years of negotiations, as well as will depend primarily upon the determination of the government in power and prevalent public attitudes.

The Global Economic Crisis to a large extent has also left its mark on the European Union's public finances. As a result of the strong economic links between the United States and the countries of the Old Continent, we had to deal with a significant deterioration of the situation in most of the Member States. Just as in the United States, private banks on the verge of bankruptcy began to clamour for public aid. In view of the potentially grave consequences, the insolvency of such large entities would certainly bring to the citizens, business ventures, and ultimately to the entire economy, the respective states were forced to yield, to a greater or lesser extent, and grant them financial support. This in turn expanded the already inflated debts of some countries (e.g. Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus) and forced them to drastically cut public spending, thereby tangibly contributing to the recession. In the

context of this crisis, the European Commission (2014) enumerated, inter alia, the following weaknesses in the functioning of the European economic system:

- Lack of surveillance of competitiveness and macroeconomic imbalances
- Weak enforcement of the law
- Slow decision-making capacity

These conclusions are very much reminiscent of what has been observed in the United States. Also over here, the financial institutions whilst taking undue advantage of the weakness of the European Commission, or the individual Member States, went on bending applicable legislation, and so the speculative bubbles appeared, inter alia, on the real estate market (vide Spain and Ireland).

Painful consequences of the collapse of public finances within the European Union forced the authorities to adopt some radical measures, as massive debt in some Member States posed a tangible risk of a collapse even in the most affluent countries of the Community. Very much like overseas, it was decided to strengthen the supervision over the financial markets. To this end the following three bodies were established:

- European Banking Authority (EBA) - responsible for the issues related to the supervision of banks, with particular emphasis on their recapitalization
- European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) - focusing on the supervision of capital markets and the rating agencies and trade repositories operating on them
- European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) - serving a similar role on the insurance market.

An emphasis is also being placed on increasing security for the bank customers, which falls well within the trend espoused by the Neo-Weberian State, i.e. more attention being paid by public institutions to the citizens' needs, and is instrumental in developing trust in the state.

Referring to the entire body of reforms planned by the European Union, it might well be concluded that a major emphasis is put upon the application of the solutions compatible with the majority of the eight principles characteristic of both Max Weber's bureaucracy (centralization of power, increasing the significance of legal regulations), as well as of those relating to New Public Management and New Public Governance (external focus on the citizen and the effects of management professionalization).

Conclusion

The above referenced reforms implemented in the United States and in the European Union demonstrate that the concept of C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert, at least to some extent is reflected in the reality, and fits in rather well into the current trends on the functioning of the state in the face of global threats. Similar changes involving the establishment of the new supervisory bodies, modernization of the law, professionalization of the civil service, or focusing on the citizens, and on the results rather than on the procedures, may be encountered in most countries that had been affected to a lesser or greater extent by the economic crisis at the beginning of the 21st c.

When assessing the reforms implemented within the respective states in terms of their consistency with the concept of the Neo-Weberian State, particular attention should be paid to whether these elements are also characteristic of Max Weber's classical bureaucracy, New Public Management and New Public Governance. This is essential, as it must be borne in mind that the model itself is basically just a collage of their positive elements. In the Author's view having those postulates invoked may make an important contribution to counteracting the negative effects of the animal spirits within the economy at large, whereas in the event of a nightmare scenario, may also limit its negative effects.

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