REFORMING THE PUBLIC SECTOR: HOW TO MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

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Ten years after. The rise and fall of autonomy in Pompeii

Theme: Transparency in/of the public sector

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Abstract
In September 1997 a regulation (law No. 352/1997) gave to Pompeii a new status: from its previous standing as a local branch of the Ministry of Culture (the Soprintendenza) it was configured as an autonomous entity (Soprintendenza autonoma). In July 2008, the Italian Prime Minister declared a one year state of emergency in Pompeii, appointing a special commissioner (Commissario straordinario) belonging to the Civil Protection in order to cope with “the serious critical situation of the archeological area” (DCPM 3692/2008). The aim of the paper is revise the process of change throughout ten years in Pompeii, observing major institutional transformations and analyzing the evolution of the activities and the human and financial resources management. Beyond shading some lights on one of the most important experiment for the Italian public sector - i.e. the autonomy of Pompeii, the paper further explores the distinctive features of the country’s public administration within a broader NPM and post-NPM debate.

Keywords: Pompeii, public sector reform, autonomy, Italy

1. Introduction
The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the administrative history of Pompeii from 1997 to 2009, investigating the rise and the fall of autonomy, a central pillar of the management oriented reforms in Italy.

The case of Pompeii is extremely relevant for the Italian context. The Superintendence of Pompeii was in fact one of the first local branches of the Ministry of Culture that experimented with greater autonomy and managerial responsibility. Beyond this, revisiting a process of change ten years after represent an interesting element, where longer term impacts of the wave of managerially of the 90ies can be assessed. This can enrich the literature on decentralization processes, which has paid only limited attention to the transformation occurring in public entities during the implementation of NPM oriented reforms (Ongaro 2006). Moreover, as we will show, the study of public sector transformation is entailing more and more often the examination of “an increasingly complex «archeology» of reforms” (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007a p. 7, see also Brunsson, 2009).

Our main findings can be summarized as follows. The administrative history of Pompeii from 1997 to 2009 is characterized by a ‘swing’ from centralization to decentralization and back. Until 1997 the Superintendence was in fact a local branch of the Ministry of Culture. Then, in September 1997, a regulation (law No. 352/1997) gave to Pompeii a new status, configuring the Soprintendenza as an autonomous entity (Soprintendenza autonoma). About ten years after, in July 2008, the Italian Prime Minister declared a state of emergency in Pompeii, appointing a special commissioner (Commissario straordinario) in order to cope with “the serious critical situation of the archeological area” (DCPM 3692/2008). This solution – somehow peculiar in itself - involves an even greater centralization, essentially making an end of the autonomy experiment.

While tracing the administrative evolution of Pompeii, it is possible to untangle the different aspects that have contributed to the failure of the autonomy without solving and perhaps increasing the decay of the site as a whole. All in all, the lack of any form of accountability and formal reporting didn’t help the Superintendence in the struggle between with the Ministry. On the contrary, it exposed the entity to serious criticism of inactivity (even if some improvements have been carried out), while offering ready-to-use justifications to political interventionism. At the same
time, both the left and right wings coalitions that were in charge during the considered period share a large amount of responsibility in the dismantling of the autonomy experiment. The unaccomplished reform in 1997, the following inconsistent institutional transformations, and the final ‘state of emergency’ mirror the incapacity of the central apparatus to decentralize and empower local branches in a long term perspective.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section we present the background of the debate about decentralization, focusing in particular on the Italian context. Next, we go deep into the administrative history of Pompeii, analyzing the rise of the autonomy (1998), its fall (2008), and the period in between. In the following section we offer a preliminary exploration of the changes which has taken place in Pompeii both in terms of activities and human and financial resources. Finally we discuss our findings and provide some direction for future research.

2. Background
The transformation of public sector is a worldwide phenomenon that in the last decades emerged in various countries at different speeds and in different ways. The general phenomenon has been extensively addressed by management literature and referred to as New Public Management (Bowerman, 1996; But & Palmer, 2000; Flynn, 2000; Gruening, 2001; Hood, 1991; Lapsley, 1988; Lindkvist & Llewellyn, 2003). Unless the theoretical roots of NPM are difficult to identify (Gruening, 2001) and “many authors offer definitions and few are identical” (Pollitt, 2001 p. 473), the general idea of NPM is that of a smaller public sector, intensively focused on efficiency and continuous improvement (Gruening, 2001; Pollitt, 2001). In order to reach this purpose, reforms promoting structural decentralization has been issued worldwide (Lapsley, 2008). Structural decentralization entails vertical and horizontal specialization, outsourcing policies and the introduction of quasi-markets (Christensen & Lægreid, 2001). More in general, decentralization aims to the creation of “accountable units [and] more business like entities” (Lapsley, 2008 p. 84). In this vein, “the future public sector will consist of small core ministries (responsible for strategy) and a range of specialized, semi-autonomous agencies (responsible for operations)” (Pollitt; 2001 p. 474). At a deeper level of analysis, according to Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) decentralization oriented reforms have led to several processes of “organizational construction”, involving the adoption of juridical personality, the ability to nominate the governing body and the formulation of statutes, mission stating, policy stating and the like.

Crucial to the comprehension of public sector reform, both at the aggregate and micro level, is the understanding of the national context within which reforms take place (Hood, 1991; Lapsley, 2008; Pollitt, 2001).

As recognized by Ongaro (2006 p. 753) “the trajectory of administrative reforms in Italy that occurred during the 1990s has been interpreted as one decisively affected by the persistent hegemony of the administrative law paradigm, a cultural paradigm that has proved a considerable capacity for survival”. This is due both to the cohesion and manipulative ability of the administrative policy community as well as the absence of any alternative paradigm really capable of challenging it (Capano, 2002). The administrative paradigm is constituted around the institutionalization of administrative law (‘juridification’) as a way of ‘being’ and ‘acting’ in public administration (Ongaro, 2006; Panozzo, 2000).
“The centuries-old values inherent in the administrative paradigm are as follow: (1) the role of law as an inevitable expression of administrative action; (2) the prescriptive identification of the functions of the decisional process (general decisions, aims, implementation and control); (3) the separation of political decision-making from the administrative implementation of such decisions; (4) the principles of impartiality and neutrality; (5) the principle of legality as an essential instrument needed to achieve the objective of administrative law; and (6) an emphasis on the overall coherence of the system (that is, of the legal system)” (Capano, 2002).

In a nutshell, the general approach to policy implementation in Italy is characterized by “the considerable importance given to the formal organizational structure as opposed to the little attention paid to policy delivery and the management of the change process implied by adapting policy delivery to new circumstances” Ongaro (2006 p. 753). As a consequence, Italy represents a peculiar case in the NPM scenario. Indeed, the introduction of managerial ideas and concepts had followed a different path compared to the pragmatic and less juridical approaches of the North European and Anglo-Saxon countries (Gherardi & Jacobsson, 2000).

In the recent administrative history of the country, Pompeii is more than an example. When the reform was approved in 1997, the Minister of Culture explicitly underlined that this was a sort of experiment, in order to make further reforms in the whole setting of the Ministry (and indeed in the general provision of public services, through a “light State”). Pompeii was a sort of social laboratory for public sector changes (Zan, 2002). Understanding what happened to this social experiment, could shade lights on the whole process of transformation of the Italian public administration.

3. The experiment of Pompeii autonomy

Two major discontinuities mark the narrative of Pompeii in the last 13 years: the rise of the autonomy status, through a legal transformation in 1997; and the fall of the autonomy, through an administrative act in 2008, establishing an extraordinary administrative status under the direct control of the Prime Ministry. This two discontinuities mark an inversion in general administrative logics: from centralized initial situation (prior to 1997) to decentralization (1997), back to centralization (2008), indeed a situation even more centralized than the starting one. In between lies a period in which a subtle straggle between central bureaucracies and the difficulties in implementing autonomy by the new entity can be found.

3.1 The rise of the autonomy: reforming Pompeii in 1997

Serious problems characterized in general the administrative situation of local branches of the Ministry, the Superintendences, as often acknowledge in the Italian debate. Moreover, at the end of the 90’s, Pompeii in particular was addressed as a special case of decay, even in physical terms (collapse of walls and houses, decays of frescos and mosaics), deserving urgent intervention. Interesting to notice, this was following a call for recovering the sites by professionals, with the publication of a “Plan for Pompeii” by the World Monuments Fund in 1997 (a detailed mapping of the site, with the needs of conservation and a plan of action for the incoming ten years, calling for a budget of 250 million Euros).

The 1997’s reform was triggering important changes, in principle:
1. A new position was introduced: the “city manager”, an empowered financial director that was supposed to bring in managerial knowledge and expertise, in case to be hired on a temporary
bases from the private sector. (Interesting enough, the English term was used by the Ministry and the Press, echoing the managerial nature of such a reform).

2. A **board of directors** was also established. Rather than the Superintendent on his/her own, the decision making process was now supposed to be shared by the Board, made by the Superintendent, the “city manager” and the oldest archaeologist.

3. The new entity received accounting and administrative **autonomy**: tickets were kept at the local level, to cover expenditures (before that – and still elsewhere – money should be sent to the Ministry, while resources appropriation by the Ministry to local entities had no relationship with ticket or other income generation).

Despite a generous acceptance by the Press of these important innovations, quite at the beginning the new situation revealed some important limitations and contradictions, which led Zan (2002) talking about an “unfinished reform”, on the basis of an analysis carried out between October 1997 and April 1998 (i.e. even before further implementation difficulties). In short, in the study of Zan (2002):

a) a general ambiguity about “tasks” and degrees of freedom of the new entity was pointed out (e.g., whether the new body was free in setting the price of ticket entry was unclear at the beginning).

b) A lack of clear criteria to identify possible candidates for the position of “city manager” emerged (this will have serious impact in the later events).

c) Some weaknesses in the setting of the board of directors were also addressed, not only for the quite small number of components (3), but also for the contrasting logics underlying their selection: the superintend (as the local representative of the Ministry), the city manager (supposedly according to a performative principle), and the oldest archeologist of the site (according to a principle of belonging).

d) The partial autonomy and accountability of the reform was pointed out, and its hidden perverse implications. Indeed, human resources were still managed by the centre, i.e. by the Ministry, and, quite consistently, were not included in the income statement of the new entity. Such a “creative accounting “ solution was not only limiting the real control of the new entity over its own resources (personnel cost, still unknown in details at the peripheral level, represent 2/3 of the total amount of resources spent on the site). This was also likely to prevent any process of reorganization of labor, making any “make-or-buy” reasoning impossible (if the board were able to find cheaper solutions through outsourcing, for instance, this was going to benefit the income statement of the Ministry, reducing labor cost inscribed at the ministry level, and raising new cost for the service, that were going to increase cost of the Pompeii Superintendence). In any case, reorganization of labor seemed to be a major problem in such a contradictory situation of partial autonomy (not explicitly including labor as a variable).

e) The potential degrees of freedom allowed by the law in terms of accounting autonomy was hardly resisted by the central apparatus from the very beginning. In the early settings of the administrative system, the new entity was forced to accept a cash based accounting system, rather than an accrual one. This might seem a marginal technicalities to the reader (and indeed could have seemed so to the board of directors when they accepted the pressure from the Minister accounting office). However, it is a crucial step in the process of resistance to change by the centre towards a “serious” situation of autonomy.
The reform, thus, presented from its very design limits and contradictions that were signs in themselves of the difficulties of defining more “elegant” and internally consistent institutional reforms, as for instance the establishment of the “one-block grant” that in the same period was applied to the British Museum (for a more explicit comparison see Lusiani & Zan, 2010), raising serious doubts on the whole impact in terms of “managerial” solutions:

“Paradoxically however, given the successful communication strategy of the Piano per Pompei, the question of financial resources will not be the main problem holding back the relaunch of Pompeii. These rather will be of a different nature: legal and ministerial resistances and contradictions; trade union resistance to management intervention in disciplining labour, even before downsizing efforts (where, as in the case of environmental issues, the trade union can sometimes find itself in a decidedly conservative position); the ability of the top management (Soprintendente and administrative director) to set in place processes for retraining skilled staff and (re-) defining managerial structures and procedures. Paradoxically, having called for fresh funding, the biggest risk is being unable to actually spend it; the main problem is one of organization, of creating the conditions and organizational functioning that allow the money to be spent, guaranteeing and monitoring the quality of all stages of the restoration work” (Zan, 2002, p. 130)

With all this limits, however, the reform was still radically changing the previous situation of centralization of the local branches of the Ministry. An unfinished process of decentralization, yet a step in this direction.

3.2 The end of the autonomy: the “commissariamento”

On the 4th of July 2008, by request of the Minister of Culture, the prefect and the government of Campania Region, the Italian Prime Minister declared a one year state of emergency in Pompeii and the commissariamento of the Superintendence “in order to intervene with extraordinary powers and to protect the historical and artistic heritage of the site” (DPCM 04.07.2008). At the end of the same month, an ordinance of Civil Protection was issued. “Considering a) that the adoption of extraordinary measures is necessary and urgent in order to avoid the paralysis of protection activities in the archaeological area of Pompeii, b) that the highly risky situation calls for extraordinary and urgent actions, aiming to acquire goods and services and to define administrative procedures for an immediate intervention, c) that extraordinary measures can be adopted only by repealing part of the normative framework…. Renato Profili is appointed as Commissario

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2 The word commissariamento is impossible to be translated in English, an expression itself of diversity in administrative notions and vocabulary. Therefore a brief explanation is necessary in order to understand the meaning of this semantically rich word. When exceptional events overcome the coping capacity of an Italian public administration, the Prime Minister, the prefect or a special commissioner may decide the commissariamento of the entity. Commissariamento is therefore a way of managing public services characterized by a temporal substitution of the ordinary management team which takes place in order to solve a crisis or an emergency. The commissariamento of a public entity is usually decided by the centre (Council of Ministers) in an highly discretionary way. When a special commissioner is appointed, a decentralized management structure is formally substituted by a centralized one. In emergency situations, efforts coordinated by the centre are thought to be more effective than decentralized ones (Baldi, 1996). Emergency situations entail then extraordinary powers: commissioners can repeal part of the laws in order to quickly re-establish the order. As a civil protection official told us “the assumption is: the emergency is on, we have to act quickly. In emergency situations, the safety of people and goods prevails on the transparency of public tender procedures”.

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straordinario (special commissioner) [...] to carry out all the essential interventions required in order to overcome the emergency and to enhance the safety of the site and of the visitors” (Ord. n. 3692/2008).

More in details, the commissioner and its 5 people team were asked to arrange an intervention plan, concerning the safeguard of the archeological area, the removal of illegal settlements located in or nearby the archeological area, the realization of extraordinary maintenance, the outsourcing of the surveillance service and the rising of funds. In order to perform his duties, the commissioner could manage 40 million €, previously belonging to the Superintendence. Besides, to speed up the administrative processes, the commissioner could repeal part of the normative framework, i.e. tender procedures and human resources management regulation, which are both particularly rigid within the Italian public administration. In parallel, to support the commissioner and to verify and control operations on the site, a commission (Commissione generale d’indirizzo e coordinamento) was created. The superintendent was part of this commission, together with officials of the ministry, the civil protection and the region.

In July 2009, the state of emergency was extended for an additional year. A new commissioner, a general manager of the civil protection, was appointed. The formal relationships between the ordinary and the extraordinary structure changed: according to the new ordinance, the superintendent could keep on join the Commissione generale d’indirizzo e coordinamento but without voting right. Moreover the share of resources allocated to the commissioner’s team increased from 0,5% to 2%, its team being now composed by 12 people - a sort of organization within the organization.

3.3. In between: institutional transformation from 1998 to 2009
What has happened between the 1997’s reform and the state of emergency declaration in 2008? In this paragraph we focus on the institutional and administrative transformations which occurred throughout 10 years. (The evolution of the activities and of the financial and human resources will be presented later on in this section).

As previously said, in 1997 autonomy was introduced to shore up a courageous strategic project to relaunch Pompeii. Although serious limitations were present in the reform, the rationale behind it was challenging: giving the Superintendence accountability on its own and making managers directly responsible for operations and results. Among the most important innovations there were the introduction of a board of directors, the appointing of an empowered administrative director and the possibility for the Superintendence to manage directly tickets earning.

Through the years, the role of administrative director (the so called ‘city manager’) was filled by officials with debatable managerial skills. In any case, in March 2008, the position of administrative director was eventually abolished (Law no. 633/2007).

In 2006 the Ministry imposed an extraordinary withdrawal of 30 million euro belonging to the Superintendence (Law no. 51/2006): “in order to realize conservation and enhancement interventions in the field of cultural heritage, the Ministry can use, within a limit of 30 million Euro, the past financial years’ tickets earnings, on condition that the mentioned funds has not been yet allocated to any specific project”. The legal interpretation of “allocated funds” was very strict: it took into account only resources for which contracts were already signed. Planned expenses waiting for tender were not considered “allocated funds”. As a consequence, there were no money for already available projects, and many feasibility studies couldn’t be accomplished. In brief, all the
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Superintendence’s programs had to be reassessed and adapted in order to fit within the new budget constraints. As the Superintendent said “we spent some troublesome days at that time. I kept on cutting restoration or excavation projects. The accountant brought me the list of activities and I cut… But in one hour he was back again because more cuts were needed”.

In addition, the Ministry decided that, from 2006, the 30% of Pompeii’s tickets earning were to be paid back to the Ministry in order to support other cultural entities (in application of Dlgs. 368/1998). The rationale of this regulation is the redistribution of resources from richer to poorer institutions. However, according to the Superintendent “if the 30 million were a one shot snatch, the 30% of tickets earnings were a yearly subscription to Pompeii’s cash dispenser”.

In April 2008 the Superintendence of Pompeii was merged with the Superintendence of Naples (D.P.R. no. 233/2007). The merger was carried out without the support of any organizational and strategic plan. In the words of a Pompeii’s accountant “the merger with Naples is increasing the expenses of the Superintendence. Naples is currently sucking money: they don’t even have resources for elevators maintenance. There are still two different accounting systems and there is no budget for the new merged entity. We are living times of total administrative improvisation”.

In July 2008, with the declaration of the state of emergency in Pompeii, we reach the end of the story. To cope with the emergency, a centrally appointed “Commissario straordinario” is substituting the board of directors, managing a great amount of the Superintendence’s funds on dispensation of certain administrative rules. The state of emergency has been extended for the whole 2009 and it is still on. The commissariamento represents de facto the (unhappy) end of the autonomy experiment of Pompeii.

From an initial situation of Ministry centralization, to an unfinished situation of decentralization with all its inconsistencies, to a final situation of even greater centralization (now under the Prime Ministry, through the Civil Protection): Pompeii describes a very peculiar experiment in the reform of public sector and new public management, indeed. A closer look to activities carried out, resources and outcomes in the decade will help understanding better such an unusual process of change.

4. Ten years after: reconstructing and assessing changes

4.1. Activities
The aim of the Plan for Pompeii (1997) was to systematically identify the intervention needs and how much funding they will require. More than ten years after, we want to understand where attention has been addressed to, both in terms of annual expenses and typologies of activities (construction, restoration, systems, excavations). However, a short premise on the pre-Plan for Pompeii situation is necessary in order to understand and evaluate the development of the site through the years.

Before 1997 the overall condition of Pompeii was very critical. In 1995, Pompeii’s extension amounts to 50 hectares, partly unearthed during the eighteenth century and partly excavated after the second world war. During the pre-reform period low quality conservation works - characterized by the diffuse utilization of concrete and other improper materials – were carried out in the site. Besides, the situation was worsen by a general lack of resources: because of the paucity of funds, conservation works were done only in emergency cases. In addition, in absence of any comprehensive conservation and safeguard program, interventions were fragmented and executed
without continuity and coherence. Finally and more in general, when talking about Pompeii, one has to consider the problem of conserving an archaeological site exposed to the elements for years, even centuries in some parts, with the consequent irreversible process of decay.

From a methodological point of view, the evolution of the Superintendence’s activities from 1998 to 2008 is particularly hard to reconstruct, since data are not available in any kind of formal report. However, thanks to some preliminary and still in progress elaborations on the board of directors’ decisions, a couple of considerations can be carried out on this issue. Our analysis is limited to the period 1999-2007: data are not available for 1998 (during its first year of activity the board has been almost only planning the projects for the following years) and are incomplete for 2008.

Some observations emerge from monetary data concerning activities carried out in the period (table 1):

- The expense for activities in 1999 was 0,5 million euro. Apart from a couple of small construction projects and an investment in security systems, the majority of the resources were allocated to the museographic design of the Antiquarium in Hercolaneum (377.849 euro). Nor restorations neither excavations were funded in 1999.
- In 2000 the total expense increases to 3,4 million. More than half of the resources were spent for construction works (in particular for the requalification of the southern part of Pompeii (1,4 mil.). In addition, four important restoration projects (Foro Triangolare, Casa del Menandro, Lupanare, Terme Suburbane) were financed. As in 1999, excavation activities were still absent.
- In 2001 the Superintendence spent only 0,8 mil, mainly for asbestos removal (170.000 €), signals on site (112.000 €), 9 small construction projects (127.000 euro) and an electronic system in Oplonti (155.000 euro). In 2001 the board approved the first excavation project: 66.000 € for an archaeological investigation in Poggio Marino.
- Expenses in 2002 increased to 3,2 mil euro. Most of the resources were allocated to restoration (22%) and excavation (28%). Excavations were carried out in Poggio Marino, a new site discovered in 2002.
- In 2003, the 7,2 mil. of expense were allocated mainly to construction works (38,1%) and excavation, still in Poggio Marino (21%).
- In 2004, the whole expense of the Superintendence for activities amounted to 5,4 mil. The 44% of the resources were spent for conservation activities (house reinforcing and waterproofing). There was another expense in asbestos removal (880.000) and an expense for integrated services in Poggio Marino (760.000 euro).
- In 2005, 4,6 million were invested in construction works, 1,7 for restoration and 1,8 for excavation in Poggio Marino. The total amount of the expenses was 9,8 mil.
- In 2006 the expense reached a peak: 20,4 million euro. 9,2 million were spent for construction works (3,4 for the new storehouse and 3,3 for a new entrance in Piazza Anfiteatro); 8,2 million were spent on restoration (14 house reinforcing projects). 1,8 million were allocated to excavations, of which 1,1 in Stabia. No resources were allocated to Poggio Marino in 2006.
In 2007 the expense decreased to 9.5 million. The 34.1% was allocated to a project aiming to bring the northern part of Hecolaneum into compliance with safety requirements. Then construction works (25.8%) and restoration (26.6%).

If we focus our attention on the typologies of activities, we can note that:

- Construction works represent one of the most important areas of expense. Expense in construction has strongly increased from 2003 onward.
- Expense in restoration activities are always relevant, an exception is given in 1999 and 2001.
- Investments on electronic, hydraulic and security systems are marginal but constant. The most of the expense in systems took place between 1999 and 2002. As recognized by the Superintendent “the condition of the systems was really bad during the first years”.
- There has been few expenses on excavation until 2002. Then Poggio Marino was discovered and a great amount of resources were allocated to the new site. Between 1999 and 2007 almost the 10% of the total expense of the Superintendence were allocated to Poggio Marino (6.7 million euros, of which 4.2 in excavations activities). Stilt houses were found in Poggio Marino in 2000, during the construction of the canal and dating to the 2nd millennium BCE. It has been supposed that Pompeii and Nocera were founded by the inhabitants of this prehistoric village before the 6th century BC. According to the Superintendent “Poggio Marino is a unique and phenomenal site. We invested in it. We could not miss this opportunity”. In 2006 and 2007 some excavations were done in Stabia. Only two excavation projects have been carried out in Pompeii (Casti Amanti in 2003, 180,000 €, and Terme Suburbane in 2004, 240,000 €), therefore confirming the “stop to excavations” policy issued in the Plan for Pompeii in 1997.

More in general, two main phases emerge from the longitudinal reconstruction of activities in Pompeii.

- From 1999 and 2002 there is a ‘start up phase’, characterized by a low level of expense. During its first meetings, the board of directors focuses mainly on planning activities, being only few projects already set. In this view, the Plan for Pompeii represented a fundamental road map to further develop the interventions on the site.
- From 2003 to 2006 expenses boomed, increasing from 7.3 million to 20 million euro. The 2006’s peak is related to EU Regional Operational Program (POR) funds’ deadline. In order to avoid funds’ withdrawal, in 2006 several previously planned activities were contracted out and implemented. Almost the 90% of the POR funds were spent, focusing the interventions on Via di Nola and Via dell’Abbondanza in Pompeii site.

All in all, the excavated area in compliance with safety requirements reached the 31% in 2008, while it was equal to the 14% in 1998. The data in itself is open to different interpretations: on the one hand the visitable portion is still less than half of the site; on the other, in ten year the ‘open’ area is almost doubled. Beyond that, investments have certainly improved the back office (new storehouses) and the demand side (new entrance in Piazza Anfiteatro). The next step of our analysis (sill in progress) will regard the analytical comparison between the Plan for Pompeii’s planned activities and the implemented projects during the following 10 years in order to better assess not only what has been done but also how much.
For sure something has been done in Pompeii. However, what emerges at the moment is also a general insensitivity to periodical reporting on things done. This exposes the Superintendence to political decisions which are often taken in absence of any ‘rational’ evaluation (the fact that the *commissariamento* was not anticipated by an overall audit report represent a clear confirmation of this point).

### 4.2 Human Resources

The introduction of forms of human resource management is generally acknowledged as one of the key factors in the transformation of publics sector, largely discussed in the NPM literature.

In this regards too, the experiment of the autonomy of Pompeii is particularly telling, considering a) the prior situation in terms of quality and quantity in the workforce composition, b) the lack of changes implied by the reform at the aggregate level, and c) the specific experience in terms of applying the performative principle in identifying the city manager over time.

#### a) The pre-existing situation

What already in 1997-8 was astonishing in analyzing the composition of the workforce was the very marginal share of professionals posts. Out of 711 workers, only 16 were architects, archaeologist and art historians, the key figures in a similar sites (those that—by law—can be responsible of work sites). Considering the dimension of the site an its articulation, even technicians (77) and workers (87) were not particularly numerous. Besides, a lot of indirect post were present (124, amongst whom 34 were typewriters), and 423 warding staff. This is likely to represent the result of years/decades (if not centuries, since the discovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1738 and 1748) of local bargaining about human resources, without ever questioning the need for specific skills and talent of specific nature. A situation of mis-staffing (over and under staffed at the same time), with numbers defined by national laws (the position in post for the whole Ministry is a law on its own), with rigid definition of fragmentation of tasks. Understanding who-does-what, and changing internal division and organizational of labor result impossible in such a context.

#### b) No changes by the reform

If we spend some space here to detail the previous situation is because nothing has changed by the reform. The definition of the labor force of Pompeii is still part of the general law of the Ministry: no changes has been introduced neither in terms of numbers nor criteria in managing human resources by the Superintendence. Numbers are the same, a part from not substituting retired people, so that in 2010 about 100 posts are not covered; in any case their status and contract has not changed.

When the first city manager went to Pompeii, he realized that he couldn’t nor bringing his own staff with him, neither hiring anyone with skills that were crucial for the transformation under place (experts in human resources, in management accounting, in accounting, in marketing & communication) (interview with Giuseppe Gherpelli, 2000). In terms of number of people, the only change that came was over him. The only thing to do was to develop skills in existing employees, selecting those that were willing to be involved.

This is perhaps the most striking element of the reform: surely the fact that it was triggered initially by the center-left government can explain the embarrassment in dealing with radical redefinition of human resources logics in the public sector (i.e. firing and hiring people with...
different skills, according to the needs). But none of the 5 ministries that came after – right and left – made any effort in this direction.

c) Top management selecting criteria
One of the most controversial issues in the whole implementation of the reform is the way in which the “city manager” position was covered over time (in all cases with a strong political character).

The first city manager was Giuseppe Gherpelli (1998-2001), appointed by the first Prodi Government (centre-left), a manager with a background in art history and a long experience in managing private and public entities in the art sector. If the profile in this case seems to well respect the logic of the new norms (yet within a sort of “political” belongingness as a precondition), some doubts were accompanying the establishment of the second city manager. Berlusconi government (centre-right) appointed the retired General of the Air Force Giovanni Lombardi (2001-2004), whose background in managing arts organizations and private like experience where questioned. The third city manager, Luigi Grimaco (2004-2008), was actually an archaeologist, appointed by the new right wing government: rather than using the board of directors to bring in different views, skills and background, in this period the board itself was made up by three archaeologists. The total lack of trust on the persons involved, led the Superintendent to threaten his dismissing (Assalto, 2006). Curiously enough, the Superintendent was again threatening dismissing in 2006, when the new centre-left government was trying to impose Antonio De Simone (Avvisati, 2007), archaeologist and professor at the University (with no direct experience in business, and yet with the same overlapping of background). Finally, in 2007 the position was definitely abolished by the Ministry of the time (centre-left government).

4.3 Financial resources
Similar reforms are likely to have an impact on financial resources at both the procedural and the substantive level. However, the implementation of the new entities following a logic of cash accounting largely limited the former.

Financial statement of the Superintendence are not publicly available. In addition, the cash logic in presence of long term projects with complex professional elements makes the accounting representation particularly difficult to understand, and to link with day to day activities by processinals. Sense making of the accounting data “in the mind of the archaeologists” is particularly problematic. On some aspects we are still working on (and waiting for) relevant data: suffice it to notice how difficult getting/commenting accounting reports is in this case (much more, in our experience, than in Malta Heritage, where all data were provided us with no restriction and in a short period; or the British Museum, where any scholar can download from the site not only the financial reports, but the memo of the board as well).

A notion of “mandate report” is totally missing: none of the City managers left a document summing up what happened in the periods they were in charge; the Superintendent himself, when retiring in 2009, did not perceived the need/opportunity to present a report on his service at Pompeii, or on the experience of the autonomous Superintendence (indeed the kind of paper that we are writing here could have been written by the involved actors, as an account of their mandates).
In more technical regards, the cash logic is also misleading from another point of view: it
does not distinguished between expenditures and reimbursement of income. For instance, when the
Ministry took over 30 million euro in 2006, this was registered as expenditures more than as a
reduction of income. With a particular focus on organizational responsibility, in table 2 a synopsis
of financial results for the decade 1998-2008 is reported, presenting the withdrawal by the Ministry
as reduction of income. Some preliminary comments can shade some light on accountability and
responsibility of the financial dynamics of the site (further elaboration are in progress):

- Inflows grew over time. At the beginning (1998-2000) this is simply the result of reduction of
elusion (Zan, 2000); in any case, more than an increase in visitors, this is the result of better
pricing, and the result of fundraising (at the European level). From this point of view the
experiment seems to have worked: not only resources were redirected to the site (for 3 to 20 and
more million Euros per year), but also ticket evasion have been reduced, and external
opportunities achieved 3.

- Expenditures were increasing rather slowly at the beginning, allowing large amount of surpluses
and residuals (indeed, activating the whole process of spending huge amounts of money,
compared the 3 million Euros prior to the reform, does not seem to have been an easy issue).

- From an accounting point of view, within a cash based accounting system the cumulated saving
(due to the difficulties in spending) led to a “danger” situation of residual, up to 44.5 million in
2003. The Superintendence was able to spend it in 2004 and 2005, therefore reducing the
cumulated saving down to 30.

- It is exactly this residual that was “confiscated” in 2006 and then used for totally different
purposes (against any logic of autonomy, responsibility, accountability that the reform once
had). In addition, from that year on, also a portion of the tickets income (up to 30%) should
have been partially returned to the Ministry.

- Again, in 2008 additional 40 million Euros were confiscated by the commissario, hiding the
positive results in fundraising achieved at the same time.

4.4. Tenders, delays and surplus
When in 2006 the Ministry imposed an extraordinary withdrawing of 30 million euro, the
withdrawal regarded all the funds that were not definitely allocated with an accomplished tender.
How comes that in 2006 a cumulated residual of 30 million euro was presented in the
Superintendence accounts? Why the Superintendence was not able to spend its own resources?
Through an archival analysis of the board of directors’ decisions and of tenders’ documentation, we
are currently trying to understand how this surplus was created, on a project-by-project basis,
analyzing the delay between the board decisions and works’ implementation during the years. In
particular what we are trying to shed lights on the hidden relationship between the centre and
periphery as far as administrative and accounting practices are concerned. Individual roles (by
administrators, local and central auditors) will be looked at, in order to reconstruct what is hardly
more easily understandable as a “deliberated strategy” than a “general coincidence”.

5. Discussion and conclusion: an evaluation

3 This also includes an interesting example of a public-private partnership with Packard Foundation in Herculaneum
(Guidobaldi, 2005; Wallace-Hadrill at al., 2008).
The whole experience (the rise and fall) of Pompeii’s reform can open discussion at various levels. For our purposes we will focus here on two main aspects: the crisis of the reform in its substantive effects on the art/culture sector in Italy, and the more general research interest concerning the uses (even before abuses) of commissariamento or similar solutions.

a) Reform and crisis in Pompeii

The giving it up of the whole experience of Pompeii Autonomous Superintendence can be summarised with a strange political equation, starting from the situation originally designed by the 1997 reform: “+ Naples – City manager + Commissario – 70 mil €”.

**Plus Naples:** the Superintendence of Pompeii was merged with Naples in 2008. In terms of underlying business model, this means basically adding costs (resources to be spent in Naples) without resources (basically revenues from Naples sites and museums were much smaller than expenditures).

**Minus city manager:** the position, introduced by the 1997 law and celebrated extensively by the centre-left minister Veltroni, was later on – and without too many debates – abolished by the Minister Rutelli, of the same political coalition (i.e., it was not a counter move by the political enemies).

**Plus Commissario:** reducing or suspending to a large extent the responsibility of the Superintendent, when the city manager position was already abolished.

**Minus 70 million €:** 30 million confiscated by the Ministry Buttiglione in 2006, totally upsetting the whole logic of the reform in terms of accountability and responsibility; and later 40 million by the commissario appointed by the Minister Bondi, again stopping any possible process of long term investment.

Interesting enough, nor formal evaluation neither assessment were presented by anyone during the whole period, in particular during the slow dismantling of the “experiment” of Pompeii autonomy. An overall failure – at least a failure to change – that couples in embarrassing ways both centre-right and centre-left parties (and the ministries involved):

- for the intrinsic contradictions in the initial “unfinished” reform (Veltroni - centre left coalition);
- for the allocation of Pompeii’s resources to other projects or cultural entities, with no connection with the Superintendence (Buttiglione - centre right coalition);
- for the suppression of the position of city manager (Rutelli - centre left coalition);
- for the introduction of the commissariamento (Bondi - centre right coalition).

All in all, Pompeii’s autonomy was progressively eroded by its original meaning during implementation. Even more seriously, changes in the rules of the game introduced from the centre over years appear to be completely detached from any systematic evaluation of the results achieved by the periphery. At the end, the failure of autonomy in Pompeii mirrors the substantial incapacity and/or lack of willingness of the central system to foster and support the processes of decentralization.

But it would be naïve to describe such a failure as a matter of “fate”. There are lucid strategies and opaque responsibilities that explain the failure to change. Mapping such a game played by different actors still requires some data for the analysis. Yet a couple of elements are clear enough:
the deliberate strategy to resist real accounting autonomy by the Ministry apparatus compared with what would have been possible by the law;

- a general lack of understanding – by politicians, by professionals, by the debate on the press – of the actual implications of apparently “technical” choices, such as the adoption of cash accounting for Pompeii Superintendence;

- a general lack of understanding of organizational and managerial needs in running day to day operations;

- a lack of understanding of the importance of reporting, and communicating achievements by professionals (the fact that we have to write a paper like this rather than reading a kind of report on the experiment of Pompeii autonomy by the Superintendent is the best sign of it).

But over all, there is a major point that would need a discussion, i.e. the issue of the Plan for Pompeii in 1997. The Plan had a time range of 10 years, with an expense estimation of 500 billion liras (about 250 million Euros) to recover the decay of Pompeii. After 10 years and after some forms of autonomy that – despite limits – have provided Pompeii with a generous increase of resources compared to the previous situation (with a cumulated income of 308 million Euros), what is the degree of achievement of the goals set by the Plan? No formal evaluation, data or report are available. To our questions, the people in Pompeii have replied in some ways, without more precise data (“the Plan was referring to Pompeii excavation alone, not the whole Superintendence”; “a better forecast of cost is that other 280 million Euros are still needed”; “there were unpredicted events such as the discovery of Poggiomarino and the associated expenditures” etc.). The Plan itself was not publicity updated and compared with actual results, therefore losing the opportunity of utilizing such a tool for strengthening professional strategies of recovery of the site.

On the government side – indeed, on various governments side – there is of course a specific political agenda that the reader can value and judge (that the right wing has been trying to cut resources and save on Culture is out of doubts). However, what is striking is, to some extent, a not dissimilar administrative attitude by the left wing too, i.e. the silent dismissal of a weak/unfinished reform.

Considering the rise and fall of Pompeii administrative experiment a crucial question emerges. At the beginning, our own understanding was that the changes occurring in Pompeii were very similar to those taking place elsewhere in the world (see for instance the British Museum’s one-block grant solution), though in contradictory or “imperfect” ways, maybe taking more time for change to happen (Zan 2002). However, what happened later rises serious doubts on whether the administrative reforms in Pompeii (or, more in general, in the cultural sector or in the Italian public administration as a whole) will ever converge to that model (in the rhetoric of responsibility, accountability etc), or will rather take a different path, totally internal to the legal/central and formal administrative system that most of us (the authors included) thought managerialism was going to overcome.

b. Authoritarian centralization. The issue of Commissariamento and post NPN: a research agenda? Despite the rhetoric of the ordinance of Civil Protection, there was no emergency in Pompeii in 2008, except from the inability to actually implement/develop the logic of decentralization. What the apparatus were not allowing to the periphery in the form of autonomy was used as an excuse to charge the responsibility of the failure to the periphery itself. Rather than the overcoming the limits
of decentralization (as sometime discussed in the post NPM literature, see Christensen & Lægreid, 2007a; Drechsler, 2005; Gregory, 2007 for an overview), here the authoritarian centralization seems to be part of the very attitude that made decentralization impossible. Indeed, even if both post-NPM reforms and commissariamento entail a certain degree of centralization, they seem to be radically different for two main reasons.

First, when the commissariamento is taken into account, it is not clear whether the choice to centralize is linked to any consideration concerning the effectiveness of a centralized effort. The real objects that the centre is trying to pursue remain unclear and very hard to discover, since the commissariamento is imbued with a strong emergency rhetoric coupled with the use of the Civil Protection – an agency originally created to overtake “natural” crisis (such as earthquakes, floods, ecc.) and recently involved to solve ‘administrative crisis’ and to manage other events (such as the organization of the G8 and religious manifestations around Italy).

Second, post-NPM implies structural reforms, intended as a long term revision of the relationships between the centre and the periphery. On the contrary, commissariamento entails the creation of a ‘state of exception’. In fact, through the commissariamento, an entity is temporarily excluded from the ordinary legal framework, this yet remaining actually unchanged. In this view, a commissariamento situation is similar to the Schmittian ‘commissarial dictatorship’, that is the declaration of a state of emergency in order to save the legal order (a temporary suspension of law, defined itself by moral or legal right) (Schmitt 1928).

In this view, the commissariamento phenomenon opens up to some interesting research questions, concerning the relationships between the discursive, decisional and practical convergence (Pollitt, 2001) of NPM and post-NPM agendas. Does the declaration of the state of emergency represent the “Italian way” to re-centralization? What is the rationale behind this particular process, since it is not aimed by its nature to the rebuilding of the welfare state? What are the implications of the state of emergency at the organizational level? Moreover, cross-country comparisons are called for, if we consider that even the translation of commissario is critical. The English term “lead official” (Jas & Skelcher, 2005; ODPM, 2003) only partially captures the Italian meaning, showing the limits communication between different administrative cultures indeed.
References

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Avvisati C., Pompei, Guzzo contro il city manager, Il Mattino, 11/10/2007


Table 1 – Superintendence’s expenses, 1999-2007

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<thead>
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<th>Board of directors’ approved expenses (€)</th>
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<td>Systems</td>
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<td>Restorations</td>
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<td>Excavations</td>
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<td>Other activities</td>
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<th>Board of directors’ approved expenses (%)</th>
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<td><strong>1999</strong></td>
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<td>Construction</td>
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<td>Restorations</td>
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<td>Safety measures</td>
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<td>Other activities</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Table 2 – Pompeii Financial report, 1998-2008 (million €)

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<td>9.51</td>
<td>16.98</td>
<td>21.65</td>
<td>17.81</td>
<td>22.48</td>
<td>36.52</td>
<td>32.87</td>
<td>32.39</td>
<td>29.68</td>
<td>32.29</td>
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<td>Cumulated result</td>
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<td>19.01</td>
<td>27.43</td>
<td>31.64</td>
<td>40.59</td>
<td>44.47</td>
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<td>29.86</td>
<td>31.09</td>
<td>4.59</td>
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<td>Whitdrawals (Butiglione &amp; Commissariamento)</td>
<td>-30.00</td>
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