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**The sustainability of public sector innovation: the dilemma of maintaining Good Government over time, based on Italian experiences**

Any success with public administration reform or innovation is defined with reference to a limited time horizon. What at a given time appears to be an undeniable advancement in the quality or effectiveness of the services delivered by public organizations, a few years later may be found to have left behind little permanent value, and may no longer be perceived as a success. This is true also of the cases studied by Albert Hirschman and by his intellectual follower Judith Tandler: the very real economic and social advancements reported in many of their seminal studies, did not survive for many years. For example, the remarkable examples of innovation in public service in the Brazilian state of Cearà that Tandler presented in her “Good Government in the Tropics” could no longer be observed few years later. Do these reforms or innovations add something permanent to the quality of public service, or public institutions?

This paper tries to confront this issue based on case material taken from a very different context: within the framework of regional development policy, inside the Italian public administration, in the early years of the twenty-first century. Based on three instances of public sector innovation that the author was directly involved with, some of the forces that can help public administrations sustain reformist processes and absorb innovative ideas and practices, are identified and discussed. While political backing is found to be behind some of the innovative discontinuities introduced in public sector, political support is short lived and cannot provide sustainability over time. Reformist change needs some kind of support from outside the Public sector, in order to be maintained over time. “Innovators” as a separate class of agents within the administration who face specific incentives, are also singled out as a potential critical force impinging on the sustainability of such efforts.