SYSTEMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN EUROPE AND THEIR CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

XAVIER BERTRANÀ HORTA
Centre per a la Innovació Local - Diputació de Barcelona

MARIONA TOMAS FORNES
Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials and Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique
The Local World Collection seeks to describe and analyse the evolution in local government in various countries of the world and to highlight the latest trends in the debate in this field. International experts aim to provide readers with an in-depth discussion of some of the most prominent issues in local government today: local electoral systems, the principle of subsidiarity, the strengthening of the cities, civil participation, territorial organisation, etc.

The Local World Collection aims to further the debate and analysis of the evolution of our local government systems into the XXI century.

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Institut de Ciències Polítics i Socials
Tel. 93 487 10 76
Informacio@icps.es

Centre per a la Innovació Local
Tel. 934 020 709
Ofm.cil@diba.es
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INTRODUCTION

Following the world economic crisis of the 1970s, public administration in the west has found itself immersed in a process of reform and modernisation of its administrative structures, in which the common denominator has often been the doctrines of New Public Management. The latter hold that the act of governing should be based on management techniques and not on public law (CAULFIELD & LARSEN, 2002: 14) - a belief that stands in marked opposition to the old bureaucratic paradigm rooted in the Weberian model, and one which offers much more than just a set of technical innovations for application in public management.

Catalan and Spanish local governments have not been immune to these processes, which first acquired importance following the economic crisis at the beginning of the 90s. At that time a clear contradiction became apparent between the model of bureaucratic management inherited, in part, from Francoism and the need to obtain results in an administration in which the provision of services was now an important element. An obvious consequence of this contradiction was that in some city halls managerial structures were introduced with clearly defined and stable areas of responsibility run along professional lines.

However, if we look beyond these specific experiences, stable professional management, clearly differentiated from political management, has not been institutionalised throughout the country's city halls and, with few exceptions, the tasks undertaken by public sector executive officers differ greatly and are not easily systematised. Further, these figures often lack the necessary training to perform these duties. The debate as to what the organisational and management model or models should be for our local governments remains open.

Elsewhere, in the various countries of the European Union, local governments play a leading role in the implementation of welfare policy - so critical for the quality of life of their citizens - and are responsible for managing a large part of public expenses. It is, therefore, essential that we have an understanding of how they are organised and that we examine the factors that affect their capacity to govern.

For both these reasons, we believe it appropriate to dedicate this Local World study to an analysis of the role and tasks of public sector chief executive officers (henceforth, CEOs) in various countries of the European Union. We should make it clear from the outset that we

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1 On going to press, the bill proposing measures for the modernisation of Local Government was still before Parliament.
2 We have excluded from this study the cases of Germany, Austria and Greece for purely pragmatic reasons. In Germany and Austria, the authority over local governance lies with the länder and analysing these would have meant widening this study to include an additional 24 cases. In the case of Greece, the
understand CEOs to be those figures that hold posts at the apex of the administrative system of the city halls. As such, they usually serve as a link between this and the political sphere, providing essential management skills to local authorities that are characterised by the provision of a wide range of services to the citizens. CEOs play a leading role, therefore, in municipal management: in many cases they are the true, anonymous leaders of their respective corporations, with responsibility for managing the administrative machinery that ensures political decisions are implemented (KLAUSEN & MAGNIER, 1998). As we shall see, there are major differences between the CEOs of the various countries. However, the fact that they all occupy the highest professional rank in their respective corporations justifies their comparative study in this Local World document.

The study is presented in seven sections. In the first section we outline the common elements or principles that characterise the institutional design of local government in the European Union. As we shall see, according to how these principles are adhered to in the various countries, four main models of local government can be identified – plus a fifth «impure» model represented by the case of the United Kingdom, which as we shall see is not easily classified with the others. The political management sphere and that of the public management of local government are very closely connected. For this reason, the explanation of these models and that of the UK – which is undertaken in sections two, three, four, five and six – allows us to characterise the different types of CEO that are found in the European Union. Finally, section seven offers our conclusions.

difficulty of including this country derives from the problems faced in obtaining information about local government. For similar reasons we have chosen not to include the particular systems of the big cities and the smallest municipalities with all their idiosyncrasies, as is clearly exemplified by Spain.

In the original Catalan study we chose to refer to the actors that form the subject of this study as Directius Públics Municipals (that is, public sector municipal managers), since all other titles that are given tend to have specific connotations both in Catalonia and Spain (as is the case of the gerents municipals and gerents secretaris) as in the other countries studied here. Comparative studies of these actors published in English, however, generally refer to them as Chief Executive Officers.

The CEOs have been the subject of an ambitious research project based on survey data organised by the University of Odense (Denmark) and which was supported by a number of research teams from various countries and from the UDITE (Union des Dirigeants Territoriaux de l’Europe – www.udite.org). The UDITE brings together most state organisations of European CEOs. The analysis of CEOs that we have undertaken is partially indebted to this research project, the findings of which have been published in various books that in a very brief period of time have become reference points for all those interested in municipal management. They include the following: Klausen, K.K. & Magnier, A. (ed.) «The anonymous leader. Appointed CEOs in Western Local Government» Odense: Odense University Press, 1998; Mortitzen, P.E. & Svara, J.H. «Leadership at the Apex. Politicians and Administrators in Western Local Governments». Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002; Dahler-Larsen, P. «Social Bonds to City Hall. How Appointed Managers Enter, Experience and Leave Their Jobs in Western Local Governments». Odense: Odense University Press, 2002.
1. **SYSTEMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN EUROPE AND THEIR CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

The political and administrative organisation of local government in the various countries of the European Union has a number of basic characteristics in common. First, the political bodies in each municipality are representative. In other words, they have been chosen by democratic election. Second, in virtually all, there is an identifiable political leader who is recognised as such, whether or not this person is referred to as the mayor. This leader may be chosen directly by the citizens or by the members of the council, or appointed by central government, while his or her political and executive powers can vary widely. Finally, in most city halls there is at least one executive officer, whose primary role is to manage, coordinate and supervise government organisation, advise politicians and ensure public resources are used rationally, efficiently and in accordance with the law.

These three characteristics reflect the basic principles of the organisation of local government, namely: the council/assembly has to control the government or executive; a political actor must be entrusted with the political leadership of the government; and they must be supported by a professional manager. On these basic features, four models of the organisation of local government or the way of governing can be constructed: the strong-mayor model, the collective-leadership model, the leadership-by-committee model and the council-manager model (MOURITZEN & SVARA, 2002). The countries studied here can be classified accordingly, as shown in the table below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Local Government Model</th>
<th>Countries</th>
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<td>Strong-mayor model</td>
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<td>Collective-leadership model</td>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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5 For a fuller understanding of the municipal electoral systems in the countries of the European Union, see: MAGRE, J. *Els sistemes electorals municipals a la Unió Europea*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 2002 (Col·lecció Síntesi, nº. 4).
As indicated in the introduction, since the political sphere and the managerial sphere are so closely connected, below we analyse the various types of CEOs according to the model of local government adopted in each country.

**Synthesis**

- The institutional design of local government in Europe follows four different models: strong-mayor, collective-leadership, leadership-by-committee and council-manager.
- The variations that exist in the models in the different countries depend on the balance achieved between the following three basic principles:
  - the council/assembly has to control the government or executive;
  - a political actor must be entrusted with the political leadership of the government;
  - they must be supported by a professional manager.
2. STRONG-MAYOR MODEL

This model places a marked emphasis on the principle of political leadership, personified in the figure of the mayor, as opposed to that of professional leadership. It is found in the countries of southern Europe: Spain, France, Greece (not included in this study), Italy and Portugal. Despite some marked differences in their institutional design – such as their respective electoral systems - these countries share a common model of political organisation and municipal government.

The mayor is the political actor legally entrusted with executive functions. Officially the mayor is responsible for executing the decisions of the council, and managing and supervising the organisation of the municipality and its staff, either because he or she holds a majority of seats in the council, or because a clear division of powers and responsibilities has been established between the council and the executive. In this system the mayor adopts a presidential role, as is clearly illustrated by the cases of Italy and Portugal, where he or she typically enjoys wide powers: the political and administrative systems of local government are centred around the figure of the mayor. In the large and medium-sized city halls, the mayor often occupies a full-time position. In this model, the CEO *par excellence* has traditionally been the municipal secretary, although in recent years this position has been called into question in various countries, with the exception of France, as we shall see below.

**Synthesis**
- The strong-mayor model is characterised by the importance of political leadership, in the shape of the mayor, with professional leadership being relegated to a position of secondary importance.

2.1. SPAIN

In Spain, local government legislation has not institutionalised a stable area of professional management in the city halls that can be distinguished from that of political management. The legislator has opted in favour of the president of the local government so that the latter might, if he or she so wishes, assume the managerial duties. Hence, the executive and management functions form part of the political sphere and not that of local government organisation (SOTO, 2003: 163).
The system of local political and executive management is centred around the mayor, but the latter is able to delegate some of these responsibilities to government teams of varying sizes. For example, the mayor can delegate some of his or her duties to the members of the government commission or to the councillors. These actors, i.e. local politicians with government responsibilities, are the only ones in any kind of position to allow the development of a system of professional management in the municipal organisations, but this would mean limiting their own possibilities – widely exercised – of occupying management positions (Longo, 1999: 34).

Over recent years, some local governments «have opted to modify bureaucratic organisational parameters in favour of post-bureaucratic management models, with a clear neo-business character. An example of this transformation is provided by the introduction of management processes» (Ramí, 2003: 129). In theory, the reason for this shift lies in the need «to differentiate between the role of the elected officials – who need to be re-politicised and for their work load in management affairs to be lightened – and that of the technocrats; in other words, to differentiate between politics and management» (Ramí, 1999: 53). However, the coexistence of the CEOs, who occupy these posts, with the mayors, in a model of government characterised by the unarguable executive power of these political actors, is complex. The delimitation of the boundary between each sphere, that of politics and that of management, lies always in the hands of the mayors.

According to the organisational model that each city hall adopts and the management areas that are eventually defined, we can identify three main types of top CEOs employed in the direct government of the Spanish city halls – simultaneously or otherwise: the «unitary» CEOs who head the whole administrative structure under the direction of the mayor, the «departmental» CEOs who are found in each of the council's departments under the direction of the deputy mayors or councillors with responsibility for the department and, finally, the CEOs of the public firms and autonomous bodies.

The position of the unitary CEOs – on whom we shall focus our attention in this Local World study - in most of the small and, above all, in the medium-sized city halls has been typically filled by the municipal secretaries, since they are the only graduate-qualified bureaucrats. The municipal secretaries are to be found in the local corporations thanks to legal imperative, since they fulfil the classic bureaucratic role of providing legal advice and the attestation of public documents, basic functions in any state of law in which the civil servant occupies a politically neutral position. Article 1.3 of Royal Decree 1174/87 provides that the government bodies of each corporation shall be entrusted with the organisational and management functions of their administrative services. As Morell Ocaña states (Morell Ocaña, 1997: 20), given this clause and the management requirements of the Spanish city halls, these bodies can take on «all» posts in terms of the bureaucratic make-up of local government; not only assessors and
inspectors but also managers - often, without their tasks having received adequate recognition and without their having received the necessary training to carry out a managerial role\(^6\).

The situation in the medium-sized and large municipal corporations is different and considerably more complex. By way of illustration, the managers in the various Catalan city halls carry out a range of different functions, but they can be classified in four main groups\(^7\):

1.- The first group includes acting as a link, and coordinating tasks, between the government team and the administrative and managerial structure. Specifically, the managers perform management and coordination tasks, informing the organisation of political decisions, introducing these at a technical level and leading the day-to-day management of the corporations, and in the opposite direction, they are accountable to the politicians concerning the results obtained both in the organisation and in the economic and financial management of the city hall.

2.- Second, the manager is a figure who carries out an important consultancy and advisory role to the members of the government team and, in particular, to the mayor, as well as undertaking tasks related to the political management\(^8\). As Francisco Longo (LONGO, 1997: 661) points out, in local administrations, political management (seeking legitimacy, authorisation and support for political initiatives and decisions) tends to have become, without having to go outside the organisation itself, the priority area.

3.- A third group of functions are related to the performance of the manager as a promoter of mechanisms of innovation in management practices. In fact, the perspective of the managerial organisation, in most cases, implies, the explicit or implicit adoption of the neo-business approach of New Public Management. Normally, there is a clear link between the management model and management innovation (RAMIÓ, 1999: 63).

4.- In some cases the managers seem to play an important external role, since negotiations with third parties are often delegated to them by the mayor.

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\(^6\) There exist notable exceptions to the situation described here. For example, the management training programmes for CEOs in small and medium-sized municipalities offered by the Barcelona Council.

\(^7\) In this section we present a summary of the tasks performed by the unitary managers of seven city halls in the province of Barcelona - whose participation we should like to acknowledge - according to a questionnaire prepared by a research team comprising Mariona Tomàs, Tamyko Ysa and Xavier Bertrana at the beginning of 2002 as part of a wider study of the political and administrative attitudes of municipal managers in the province of Barcelona. The criteria adopted in selecting these managers was that they recognised themselves as such, independently of the legal system to which they were ascribed. We present their replies as an example of the tasks performed by CEOs in the city halls where the government team has explicitly sought to transform the municipal organisation by introducing a managerial design.

\(^8\) Taking as our points of reference only the central elements of Moore's concepts of policy management and political management (1998: 231).
Finally, other functions were surprisingly only mentioned by a few managers. These included preparing and controlling the budget, the technical review of decrees and agreements taken by the government team and the council, human resources management and drawing up strategic plans.

There can be little doubt that the fragmentary nature of the subsystem of Spanish local government not only fosters the heterogeneity of the tasks performed by the secretaries, managers and the other management staff, but also that of the political structures and the municipal governments. Yet at the same time this situation is favoured by the lack of a regulated framework of responsibility that facilitates managerial actions, one that was not even recognised in local government legislation until the last amendment to Law 7/85 on the Foundations of Local Government, and made operational through the legal measures for local government organisation in 2003.

**Synthesis**

- In Spain, local government legislation has not institutionalised a stable area of professional management in the city halls that can be distinguished from that of political management.
- Only local politicians, and specifically the mayor, are in a position of allowing the development of professional management functions in the municipal organisations.
- The CEOs carry out a wide range of management tasks that do not always match their particular strengths or training.

**2.2. FRANCE**

In France, in common with the other countries of southern Europe, providing a general description of the role and duties of the CEOs (*Secrétaires Généraux*) is no easy task, because of the highly fragmentary nature of the local government subsystem in the country. The situation of the CEOs in the small municipalities – which make up the majority as there are more than 36,000 municipalities for a population of about 60 million inhabitants - cannot be compared with that of those in the big cities, despite the institutional isomorphism that characterises them.

With this in mind, the CEOs in the French municipalities safeguard the legality of the decisions taken and generally lead the administrative organisation in such matters as providing direction for the municipal strategic plan, ensuring that the objectives set are achieved, coordinating resources, guiding project implementation, supervising public services, managing staff and working with other public and private agents (UDITE, 2000).
The power and prestige of the CEOs derive from the fact that they are the main channel of communication between the mayor - who has complete freedom to appoint the manager, as well as remove him or her from office - and the municipal administration. A typical feature in the case of France is that many mayors occupy elected positions in the National Parliament as well as in the regional councils and in those of the departaments. In order for these posts to be compatible with the post of mayor, they rely heavily on the CEOs for the day-to-day running of the municipality: this is one of the reasons why their role is of such importance in the French cities (THOENIG & BURLEN, 1998: 191).

Similarly, the CEOs in France share a common trait: while in theory they are politically neutral, their job involves seeking a consensus between the political parties when it comes to taking decisions - depending on the distribution of majority and minority groups in the assembly. As Thoenig & Burlen state, the French CEOs have to seek an equilibrium: they have to manage bureaucratic and administrative affairs, but at the same time they participate in the decision-making of the city halls. Seen in this light, they are political players (THOENIG & BURLEN, 1998: 195). In other words, the Secrétaires Généraux «make the policies of those that are elected but do not play the political game» (UDITE, 2000: 72). The role is, therefore, both complex and subtle, since they often have real political influence without having any formal political power.

**Synthesis**

– The CEOs in the French municipalities safeguard the legality of the decisions taken and generally lead the administrative organisation; they are the main channel of communication between the council and the mayor. At the same time, they are «political» players who participate informally in the taking of decisions.

### 2.3. ITALY

There can be little doubt that in Italy local government has been strengthened by the latest reform measures, in particular, by that of 1993 concerning the direct election of the mayor (for further details, see volume nº 2 in this collection). Furthermore, each legislative change introduced throughout the 90s has meant changes in the functions of the Segretario Comunale. It should be pointed out that in Italy a distinction is drawn between the Segretari Comunali and the Segretari Capo (municipal secretaries with a minimum period of service) and the Segretari Generali of the municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants (who are municipal secretaries that have been selected from the Segretari Capo by competitive examination).

Towards the end of the 90s, the Italian municipal secretaries were recruited each year by a national examination set by the Ministry of the Interior and which is open to all graduates in law
or related subjects. Their appointment to the municipalities was usually the result of informal contacts between the Ministry of the Interior, the locally elected representatives and the secretaries themselves. In theory, it was the mayor - with responsibility for managing the municipal administration - that was at the head of the hierarchy. However, as occurs in Spain and France, the municipal secretaries were at the service of the whole corporation and their main duties, laid down by legislation, were the classic bureaucratic functions of providing legal advice and the attestation of public documents.

Law 142, passed in 1990, which introduced statutory autonomy for the municipalities, also opened the door for an innovative concept of managerial responsibility. It established a set of managerial functions that would have to be undertaken by the CEOs provided that the municipal laws or statutes of each city hall had not assigned them to the government bodies. They included managing services, supervising the work of the departmental heads (the *dirigenti*), coordinating their work in accordance with the directives of the mayor and implementing the decisions of the political bodies.

The changes made by the 1990 act led many to highlight the incongruence between this new concept of managerial responsibility and the recruitment of secretaries by the central government - indeed, this has become the central issue in the debate concerning the status of these figures up to the present day. Despite this, the practice of entrusting many of these duties with the executive committee or the *giunta*, and not with the CEOs, continued to occur until 1993.

Law 81, passed in 1993, in addition to placing the mayors at the heart of municipal organisation, while not granting them greater freedom to recruit/dismiss the secretary, established the principle of the separation of powers between the government bodies and the CEOs. In other words, it drew a distinction between political and management tasks. The government political bodies were given responsibility for defining the objectives and the plans of action, while the CEOs were made responsible for financial, technical and administrative management. In some cities, this gave rise to the recruitment of *city-managers*, appointed to the posts on the basis of political confidence, or to the contracting of external consultants in the field of administrative reorganisation (Gamberucci & Magnier, 1998: 207).

Subsequently, it was the Bassanini Law (Law 127: 1997) - faithful to the philosophy underlying the 1993 Law, which was to modify the position and the duties of the Italian municipal secretaries. This law created the figure of the director general, which was to coexist with the secretaries in the municipalities of more than 15,000 inhabitants. Although their functions were not clearly defined, major changes were made to those of the secretaries. From this moment on, the secretaries provided legal and administrative support to the municipal bodies and supervised the departmental heads in the carrying out of their tasks, as well as coordinating
their activity, unless a director general was appointed. As a result, the distribution of tasks between these figures is somewhat ambiguous, as is also the relationship between them, and these aspects have to be regulated in greater detail in each municipality by the mayor.

In short, this law grants the secretaries more powers but at the same time allows the mayor to entrust the director general with tasks of a managerial nature. Furthermore, after the introduction of the Bassanini Law, the secretaries are now chosen by the mayors from those included on a regional register, in accordance with the demographic and structural characteristics of the municipality, and the professional qualifications of each; the secretaries lose their position with the mayors, although once nominated, they cannot be dismissed unless they violate their official duties.

**Synthesis**

– The role of the municipal secretaries in the Italian city halls has been strengthened by recent local government reforms. However, the post of director general has also been created. The distribution of functions between the two is ambiguous and ultimately depends on the decision of the mayor.

2.4. **PORTUGAL**

In Portugal, the existence of CEOs in local government is a recent creation - with the exceptions of the two main cities, Lisbon and Porto – reflecting the present requirements of municipal management. According to data published by UDITE, in 2000 there were some twenty municipalities with a figure similar to that of the CEO (UDITE, 2000: 82).

The classic figure of the CEO, which was similar to that of the Spanish municipal secretaries during the years of Franco rule, disappeared in 1984. That is, ten years after the 1974 democratic revolution which culminated in the signing of the 1976 Constitution and which ushered in local autonomy and democracy. Since then, the task of supervising and coordinating the organisation has been the responsibility of the local executive, the body entrusted with appointing the departmental directors and the heads of division that manage specific municipal services.

The heads of division are known as Municipal Administrative Superintendents (MASs). The MASs perform a managerial role in that part of the organisation for which they have responsibility. They work alongside the elected representatives – both the mayor and the deputy mayors with responsibilities for different government sectors – in a very narrow relationship based heavily on trust. In practice, the MAS with responsibility for general and administrative
services usually emerges as a *primus inter pares* from the group of superintendents, becoming the mayor's right-hand man (UDITE, 2000: 83).

The tasks that the mayor eventually takes responsibility for, and hence those undertaken by the SAMs, depend on the number of inhabitants in the municipal corporation – and, thus, on the complexity of the administrative structure and the ability of the mayor to dedicate themselves full time to the post, etc.—, as well as on the relationship that is established between the two actors. However, equally, the mayor can intervene in management affairs, given that the post carries many executive powers and the boundary between the political and administrative spheres is quite blurred (UDITE, 2000).

**Synthesis**
– The Municipal Administrative Superintendents (MASs) assume the professional leadership of the Portuguese city halls. The most important superintendent tends to be the one with responsibility for general and administrative services, frequently emerging as «first among equals».
3. **COLLECTIVE-LEADERSHIP MODEL**

In the collective-leadership model, adopted among others by Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the decision centre is formed by a collegiate body, the executive committee or the *collège des bourgmestre et échevins*, which is responsible for most of the executive functions. This executive committee comprises the councillors with responsibilities for matters of government (*échevins*) and is presided over by the mayor (*bourgmestre*).

In these countries, the mayor is designated by the central government or the crown, albeit that the margin of discretion of the central authority is different in the three cases (MAGRE & BERTRANÀ, 2003: 70). Consequently, the role of the mayor is less important both in practice and symbolically. It is a model in which the emphasis is placed on the collective nature of leadership and not so much on professionalism or individual political leadership.

The cases of Belgium and Luxembourg are very similar. The executive enjoys wide powers as regards the operational management of the local authorities and it is the body with responsibility for executing the council's decisions. The management of the different government sectors typically lies with the *échevins*, albeit that the decision making is always a collective process. The mayor, chosen from among the councillors, is the ceremonial leader of the municipality. However, in both countries, it is important to stress that in practice the party with the political majority tends to dominate the council, a fact that gives it considerable power over the *collège* and its members. In contrast, in the case of the Netherlands, the mayor has no link whatsoever with the local municipality.

**Synthesis**

- In the collective-leadership model, the decision centre is formed by a collegiate body, the executive committee, which is responsible for most of the executive functions. Consequently, the role of the mayor is less important both in practice and symbolically.
- It is a model in which the emphasis is placed on the collective nature of leadership and not so much on individual professionalism or political leadership.

3.1. **BELGIUM**

In Belgium, municipal secretaries occupy a legally defined post and their administrative and financial powers are also defined by law (17 October 1990). The CEOs are responsible for
supervising the municipal staff – with the exception of the superintendent of police and the treasurer - and usually the post holders have a very good knowledge of the entire municipal structure, since they are the directors of municipal services under the authority of the executive and act as the sole intermediaries between the political and administrative spheres. Similarly, they perform the classic bureaucratic functions of providing legal advice and the attestation of public documents; the post holders are also responsible for preparing all matters to be taken before the assembly and the executive.

The political independence and neutrality of the government are safeguarded by a statute that protects the civil servants and municipal workers from political arbitrariness. In fact, it would appear to be the case that these norms are increasingly being violated since the mayor and the councillors tend to interfere more and more in administrative matters, becoming *de facto* 'municipal employees'. In other words, the politicians tend to deal directly with the administrative staff, by-passing the CEOs. Technically, neither a councillor nor a member of the executive can give instructions to the CEOs (who can only obey the collective decisions of the executive or the municipal council). In practice, however, the CEOs receive instructions from these persons and have to act upon them, within reasonable limits (UDITE, 2000: 67), while at the same time they are also able to influence the decision-taking process by acting as technical or legal consultants.

**Synthesis**

– In Belgium, the municipal secretaries occupy a legally defined post and their administrative and financial powers are defined by Law 17 October 1990. Despite this, the mayor and the councillors tend increasingly to interfere in administrative matters, becoming *de facto* 'municipal employees'.

### 3.2. LUXEMBOURG

In the case of Luxembourg, the executive committee has to implement the resolutions taken by the municipal council, manage the various municipal projects, supervise the correct provision of local services and manage the personnel. The mayor plays a leading role in the carrying out of the executive functions and presides over the municipal council.

The municipal secretary - known as the secretary general in the capital of the country - is present at the council meetings and takes the minutes of the sessions, though he or she cannot intervene in the meetings. The post holder coordinates the municipal services and is head of personnel. He or she is subject to the authority of the council, that of the mayor and that of the councillors that make up the government team. The relations of the secretary with the executive depend heavily on the management style of the mayor and the councillors.
3.3. NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, mayors are elected by the central government but unlike the system operated in Luxembourg and Belgium they are not councillors, rather the post holders are chosen following a consultative process with the Municipal Council and the King’s Commissar in the province, from a body comprising former deputy mayors (échevins), civil servants, former permanent deputies, former ministers, former secretaries of state and former members of the second chamber. Therefore, they are usually figures with no personal links to the municipality. The rationale underlying this system is that the post holders should be «professional» figures and that they will perform their duties efficiently thanks to their independence from the other municipal organs, and the fact of their not being subjected to the pressures of re-election (MAGRE & BERTRANÀ, 2003: 70).

Coherent with this system of appointment, the mayors perform predominantly a supervisory role to ensure the adequate preparation, adoption and implementation of municipal policies. For example, the mayor publishes an annual report about the quality of the services provided by the council and the findings are made public. The body entrusted with the day-to-day management of the administration, the financial management and the implementation of the council’s decisions is the executive committee (the collège des bourgmestre et échevins). As in Belgium and Luxembourg, the management of the different sectors of government is usually in the hands of the deputy mayors, but despite this the taking of decisions is always a collective affair.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that in the Netherlands both the mayor and the executive can set up government committees to undertake the functions that they choose to delegate. The delegating organ (be it the mayor or the executive) decides on the organisation and the make-up of the committees. For this reason, these organs typically call upon the committees to provide them with technocratic support in the exercise of their duties.

The origin of the municipal secretaries can be traced back to the XIX century, but their role in the city halls has evolved over the decades. The law states that the CEOs should be appointed and removed from office by the executive committee. The main task of the manager is to assist this committee, the mayor and the committees set up in turn by both these organs. However,
the executive committee defines the specific functions to be performed by the CEOs. In practice, the CEOs usually act as the nexus between the political and administrative system, performing duties that go beyond those laid down by law. Their importance varies according to the municipality in which they work: in some cases they hold a very strong position, providing leadership for the entire administrative organisation and taking decisions on their own initiative, while in others they only give technical support (UDITE, 2000).

Two interrelated factors have progressively eroded the position of the municipal secretaries. The first of these is concerned with the way in which the executive functions. Although executive decisions are formally taken by this collegiate body, executive responsibilities in the various government sectors are now frequently divided among the deputy mayors. Often, the decisions of the executive committee are strictly formal in character. As a result, in practice, the deputy mayors develop much stronger relations on an individual basis with the management personnel, such as the department heads, in the different sectors of government, than with the CEOs.

The second factor refers to the administrative reorganisation programmes that municipal management structures have undergone in recent decades and, from among these, the growing introduction of models centred around the various government sectors. When this has occurred, the secretaries or the CEOs have often seen their roles reduced to the provision of technical support to the political bodies and, in the best of cases, to interdepartmental coordination or to the management of a department (BERVELING ET AL., 1998: 162-163).

<table>
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<td>– In the Netherlands, mayors are not chosen by the citizens of the municipality rather they are professional figures, which guarantees the neutrality of their decisions (often linked to the supervision of municipal politics).</td>
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4. LEADERSHIP-BY-COMMITTEE MODEL

In Denmark and Sweden, remaining faithful to a design of minimum institutionalisation, the local authorities’ powers of self-management are especially wide in comparison with the rest of the countries examined here and can give rise to the existence of very heterogeneous forms of local government. For example, by exercising these powers, the council can introduce changes to the electoral systems and the norms regulating the composition of the executive bodies established in local government legislation (MAGRE & BERTRAN, 2003: 76).

The lowest common denominator in the local governments of these countries is the existence of a collegiate executive body which undertakes tasks of management and strategic coordination. In the case of Sweden these tasks are performed by the executive committee, while in Denmark they are performed by the finance committee. In both countries the presidents of these committees are the political leaders of the local authority thanks to the political majority they enjoy in the council. However, the executive powers of an operative nature in the different government sectors are generally exercised by permanent committees set up by the council; the latter also defines the limits of the authority of these committees. The committees prepare council decisions, implement them and manage the business that corresponds to their area of authorisation, within the framework of the budget passed in accordance with the resolutions of the council. It is usual that these bodies are able to delegate certain powers to their members and local authority employees.

In these countries, therefore, we find that the exercise of executive tasks is spread widely among various bodies: the political leader may have responsibility for certain executive functions but others may be the duty of the committees or the CEOs. It is a model in which the CEO often acquires the greatest importance in terms of responsibilities and decision-making – if we ignore for the time being the cases of Finland and Ireland which we shall examine below and which adopt a council-manager model.

Consequently, the mixture of the three characteristics that define the organisation of local authorities - the council/assembly has to control the government or executive; a political actor must be entrusted with the political leadership of the government; and they must be supported by a professional manager (MOURITZEN & SVARA, 2002) – is greater than that found in the other countries and models.
4.1. DENMARK

In Denmark, the CEOs (Kommunaldirektoren) typically undertake three tasks. First, they act as the main advisors to the municipal council and to any other political group represented therein. Together with the mayor, the CEOs prepare the agenda and keep the minutes of the council's meetings. Second, they act as the main advisor of and interlocutor with the Finances Committee, which is responsible for the budget, personnel policy, coordinating city policy and planning and which is, in short, the true collegiate executive of the Danish municipalities. The Finances Committee has to be consulted on all matters related to the economy and administration before these are presented before the municipal council. Third, the CEOs are head of all administrative staff, and they take charge of the administration and coordination of all the departments in the framework of the directives issued by the Finances Committee. They are assisted in these tasks by managers of the different government sectors, who they in turn coordinate. The areas in which these managers work generally coincides with the operative areas of the permanent committees (UDITE, 2000: 69).

In principle, Danish CEOs enjoy a high degree of political independence, although they have to work closely with the mayor in managing the local authority. The CEO can be contracted and dismissed from the post by the council without any restriction. The heads of department find themselves in a similar position. By contrast, the appointment of all other personnel is the responsibility of the finances committee. The CEOs have a high degree of manoeuvre and have close links with the political management. They are the leading advisors to the mayor and are responsible for the heads of the departments. As such, the CEOs act as a nexus between the professional/administrative organisation and the politicians. The mayor is usually employed full time and is paid accordingly. He or she holds, therefore, the most important individual role in the municipality as regards the political sphere of influence.

In short, the CEOs in the Danish municipalities find themselves occupying a dual position for two main reasons. On the one hand, they are appointed by the council and they serve and give advice to this body, as well as to all the other political groups represented on it. On the other
hand, they are accountable to the sole, full-time political figure, the mayor, in the performing of most of the managerial functions.

Indeed, in spite of the importance of the duties that the CEOs undertake, legally they do not exist and as such the locals authorities are under no obligation to create them. Thus, officially speaking they are weak figures - especially, when the mayor holds a comfortable political majority in the assembly. This apparent paradox arises out of the fact that to a great extent the influence of a CEO is derived directly from the mayor (EJERSBO ET AL., 1998: 98).

The division of duties between the mayor and the CEO often reflects the style of management of the former – and in some cases the style and influence of the CEO. At one extreme we find CEOs that act as de facto executive leaders of the respective organisations, performing the three main tasks outlined above by operating through the delegations of the different political bodies. At the other, we find CEOs whose functions are restricted to that of an advisory role to the mayor and the other political bodies (EJERSBO ET AL., 1998: 99).

### Synthesis

– In Denmark, the figure of the PMD does not exist as a legal or a compulsory figure. However, the Danish PMD usually carries out important management duties under the leadership of the mayor and enjoys a high degree of independence.

### 4.2. Sweden

Officially, in Sweden, the CEOs (kommundirektör) are also weak figures since in common with their Danish counterparts they occupy a post without any clearly defined duties in law – the only restriction affecting them is that they cannot be elected. In fact, the post does not even have to be created, though if it is, the local politicians are the ones who define the nature of the job. Yet despite this, they usually have important financial responsibilities and coordinate management tasks (UDITE, 2000: 85).

The roles of the politicians and the CEOs should not, on paper, overlap. Yet, in practice, there is considerable confusion, both among the political parties and among the citizens. Conflicts have frequently arisen on matters that lie on the limits of the separation of the duties undertaken by the two and, more often than not, the CEOs come out worse – in particular if the mayor holds a majority in the assembly. In order to solve this problem, the 1992 local government reform measures stated that the CEOs could only undertake administrative duties and that they had to execute all political decisions without the right to question them (UDITE, 2000).
Synthesis
– In Sweden, the figure of the CEO is, on paper, weak and the separation of duties with the elected representatives is unclear. The latest reform measures have sought to reduce the confusion and to delimit the political and management spheres more precisely.
5. COUNCIL-MANAGER MODEL

Within the European Union, this is the model adopted in Finland and Ireland, but elsewhere it is also the model used in Norway, Australia and by many local governments in the United States. In this model, all the executive functions are in the hands of a professional manager, the city-manager, who is appointed by the municipal council — although in the case of Ireland, the appointment is made on the recommendation of the Local Appointments Commission, a decision which the local council cannot reject. The council has general authority over public policy, but it cannot intervene in administrative tasks, which are the responsibility of the manager, the real executive leader. The mayor acts solely as the president of the council — generally on a part-time basis - and fulfils what is basically a representative and ceremonial (symbolic) role, even though he or she might lead the party with the majority of seats in this assembly.

**Synthesis**

– The main characteristic of this model is the importance of the manager, the true leader of the municipal executive.

5.1. FINLAND

In Finland the manager is subordinate to the executive committee, in other words, to the municipal board. The latter is responsible for the administrative and financial management of the local authorities, for preparing matters to be discussed in the council and for carrying out the council's decisions. There is no clearly defined political leader, nor any one figure who receives the title of mayor: 49% of the managers consider the political leader to be the president of the executive committee, 38% the council president and 11% another figure altogether (SANDBERG, 1998: 115).

The managers direct the administrative and financial organisation of the local government authorities subordinate only to the municipal board, which is no more than an emanation of the council. The council can control the executive leadership of the manager within the established legal framework and thus give rise to three possible executive models: the traditional model – whereby the CEO is appointed for an indefinite period of time, the managerial model – whereby the CEO is appointed for a fixed period of time, which is usually between five or seven years, and finally the mayoral model – whereby the CEO is appointed for the term of office, that is, for...
four years, and he or she takes on the position of president of the municipal executive, the board. The most widespread model is the second while no local government has adopted the third (SANDBERG, 1998: 116).

Finally, it should be pointed out that a distinctive feature in these countries characterised by the executive role of the CEO is the possibility that he or she might be censured. In the case of Ireland, which is described below, this requires the support of at least two thirds of the councillors, but this motion has to be accepted by the Local Appointments Commission, which is the body that appointed the manager and the only body with the power to dismiss him or her from the post. In Finland, either the council – with the support of a quarter of the councillors - or the executive can present a proposal for the dismissal of the CEO if the latter does not enjoy their confidence. The decision has to be supported by two thirds of the council (MAGRE & BERTRAN, 2003: 78).

**Synthesis**

– In Finland there is no clearly defined political leader, nor any one figure who receives the title of mayor. The executive leadership of the manager is controlled by the municipal council, giving rise to three models: the traditional, the managerial and the mayoral model.

5.2. IRELAND

In Ireland, the manager assumes all the executive powers, and he or she is empowered to contract all the human resources deemed necessary to put them into practice. It is the most obvious case in Europe of technocratic primacy in the exercising of executive functions because in Finland, where the manager also undertakes most of the executive functions, the figure is subordinate to the strategic control of the executive committee.

However, in both cases, the law establishes a clear distinction between political and management functions. Political functions are restricted to the municipal council, while executive functions – that is, all those linked to the implementation of the council’s decisions - are in the hands of the CEOs. The latter control the day-to-day business of local government and supervise the correct application of policies passed by the elected representatives with a high degree of administrative discretion.

This division of responsibilities that lies at the heart of the management system of Irish local government is seen by some as its great success and by others as the negation of democracy. Its supporters applaud the combination of impartiality and initiative that it grants the local managers; the local politicians, worried by the implementation of policies and the management
of social conflicts argue that it deprives them of the power to take decisions on the small matters that most concern the citizens (ASQUITH & O’HALPIN, 1998: 68).

Some of the most important duties of the CEOs in Ireland are: informing the mayor and the council members about the implementation of the decisions taken by the council; recruiting, training, managing and motivating city hall personnel; drawing up the budget; promoting relations between the city hall, the local community, various agencies, the state and the private sector, and ensuring that local government works to improve the quality of life of its inhabitants (UDITE, 2000).

**Synthesis**

– Ireland provides the clearest case in Europe of technocratic primacy in the exercising of executive functions. The latter are reserved for the manager, who controls the day-to-day business of local government and supervises the correct application of policies passed by the elected representatives with a high degree of administrative discretion.
6. THE CASE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the United Kingdom, the Town Clerk was historically responsible for the legal and administrative affairs of the local authorities and he or she acted as *primus inter pares* in relation to the other management staff. In the 60s, the local authorities played a key role in the implementation of the welfare policies promoted by the central government and the practice of appointing professional Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or executive heads was set in motion. Following the 1972 reform, which reduced the fragmentary nature of the local government system, the appointment of CEOs became general practice. The recruitment of this figure was performed by a commission drawn from the parties represented on the council. His or her main task was administrative coordination and supervision. As for the political leader, he or she was chosen from among those elected to sit on the council and the job was performed on a part-time basis, that is until the latest reform measures introduced by the Local Government Act, 2000.

The introduction of this act has brought about major changes in the institutional design of the local authorities of England and Wales. Specifically, various «executive models» have been defined that strengthen the political leadership of the executive in the city halls. These models are the executive of mayor and cabinet, the executive of leader and cabinet and the executive of mayor and manager. The mayor, thanks to the application of these models, has undergone a major transformation from a figure of honorific nature to become a figure of great weight. Three years after the passing of the law, most municipalities with more than 85,000 inhabitants and a third of the rest have opted for the leader-cabinet model, unlike London where a system of direct election was chosen.\(^9\)

Before the introduction of the Act, the CEO in each corporation performed important functions. First, the English CEO was a corporate manager responsible for the overall strategic design of local government and he or she carried out a planning role. Second, the CEO was a political manager, acting as a nexus between political and administrative spheres undertaking tasks of administrative coordination and management. Third, the post holder used to fulfil an important role in the operational management, above all, in the management of the general services department (UDITE, 2000). Today, the general strategic design of local government is undertaken by local executives, but the CEOs continue to play a leading role in administrative

\(^9\) It is worth highlighting that within the legal framework established in 2000, the self-governing powers of the British local authorities remain very high. Indeed, in the model of leader and cabinet, the «executive functions» are carried out in accordance with the provisions in the 'executive agreements' – which are similar to the Spanish organic laws passed by the council in each local authority - by the executive as a collegiate body, by any of its members – including the leader, by any committee created by the executive or by the employees of the local authority. The leader only assumes directly those functions for which no provisions have been made in the executive agreements. Further, there are many circumstances in which delegation is possible.
coordination, heading general and administrative services. Further, they are the main policy advisers to the government teams.

**Synthesis**

– In the United Kingdom, the CEOs and their team carry out important functions: planning, acting as go-betweens, coordinating and managing. The Local Government Act (2000), which has made major changes to the institutional design of local government, does not appear to have weakened this figure.
7. **Conclusions**

The CEOs in the European Union countries that we have analysed present a number of characteristics that, on the one hand, make their roles comparable, but which, on the other, differentiate them from executives working in other public administration offices. Indeed, the CEOs usually work directly with the elected officials, without the mediating role of other managerial figures employed on a fixed-term basis according to the sole criteria of providing political confidence. They are professional public administrators that occupy the topmost rank in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the municipalities. As a result, it is safe to say that the connection between politics and professional administration is more intense in local government than at any other level of governance. Further, the CEOs control and manage at the very least a major part of the municipal administrative organisation – and in some countries all of it. Finally, since local governments are those that are closest to the citizens, the CEOs of these different countries usually have important links with the local community (MOURITZEN & SVARA, 2002: 9-10).

The power that is derived from these common characteristics places the CEOs *a priori* in a very strong leadership role. However, this strength can be limited or extended according to the subjective nature of each individual and to the relations that are established between the CEOs and the elected officials in each case, as well as by the structural nature of the various systems of local government - in particular, by its institutional framework and, related to this, by the political and administrative culture of each country.

An analysis of the position and tasks of the CEOs reveals significant differences between the countries and the models analysed. In the local governments there is a high degree of interconnection between the political sphere and that of public administration. Therefore, at least officially, the position of and the tasks performed by the CEOs depend, to a large extent, on the position and executive powers of the politicians, and therefore, on the form of local government.

Generally speaking, in those countries in which local government has adopted the strong-mayor or the collective-leadership models, political leadership has the upper hand over professional leadership, and the CEOs – personified in the figure of the municipal secretary - do not have powers of control, as these are exercised officially by the politicians. The definition of areas of professional management lies in the hands of these actors – with the exception of the case of Italy, where the managerial «dimension» of the tasks of the CEOs is clearly recognised by law and, to a certain extent, that of Belgium. However, the municipal fragmentation combined with the growing complexity of municipal management means that in many city halls these actors often end up performing executive tasks even though this is *ex lege*, and they go from being
neutral, independent technocrats to performing a role of political management, according to the relationship that they establish with the elected officials.

The role of the CEOs in terms of responsibility and decision-making is usually more important in the countries of Scandinavia which have adopted a model of leadership by committee, and in the United Kingdom. The need for professional administrative leadership in local government seems to form part of the administrative culture of these countries. However, the CEOs find themselves occupying a dual position. On the one hand, they are appointed and dismissed by the council – while all other personnel are appointed by the executive committee or the mayor. On the other, their power depends to a large extent on the relationship they have with the municipal political leader or the mayor - who is usually the sole full-time elected official - and the delegation who in favour of these actors form the organs with executive powers. With some limitations, the delegations are permitted by local government legislation which, by contrast, does not regulate the position and tasks of these actors.

Finally, in Finland and Ireland the CEOs play a very important role. The carry out all the executive tasks, that is, those related with the implementation of the council’s decisions - albeit that in the case of Finland the CEO performs these duties under the direction, supervision and control of the executive committee. The council has the power of censure, although in the case of Ireland, the final decision concerning the appointment and dismissal of the CEO does not lie with the local governments.

It can be inferred from this that, in general, the degree of municipal autonomy in the countries that lie in the north of Europe – that is, those that have adopted the models of leadership by committee and technocratic control - when deciding matters related to the appointment, the «labour ties» and the salary of the CEOs is very high (PLEES & DE LEEMANS, 2002: 28). The exception, as we have seen, is provided by the case of Ireland.

Although they derive from very different historical traditions, most of the states of the European Union have introduced major reforms in the institutional design of their local government systems over the last two decades. In Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, the German länder, the six Austrian länder and in some local authorities in England there has been a tendency to introduce a greater separation of powers between the executive and council powers. Parallel to this, the political and executive leadership of the mayor has been strengthened and this figure has been invested with greater democratic legitimacy through the introduction of a system of direct election - with the exception of the Netherlands, where it seems that direct election will be introduced in 2006, and Spain. Above all in those countries in which changes in the institutional design of local government have not been made, the role of

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10 Similarly, it is yet to be seen whether the reforms introduced in Flanders (Belgium) will break with this general pattern given that the introduction of the direct election of the mayor without strengthening the executive role of the position is currently being debated.
the mayor, as well as his influence in the political system, is growing (LEGALÉS, 2002: 242). The tendency is for greater professionalism among local politicians with government responsibilities and, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the days of the amateur politician seem to be numbered (CAULFIELD & LARSEN, 2002: 17; LEGALÉS, 2002: 239).

These processes are the consequence of reform measures that do not always coincide, but which have gradually introduced major changes in the relationship between the elected officials and the CEOs, and in the definition of the professional conditions and duties of the latter. For example, in the case of Spain, which since the arrival of democracy has adopted a strong-mayor model, and where the CEO par excellence in most city halls has been the municipal secretary, it is likely that the strengthening of the mayors will require greater professional managerial support linked, with certain restrictions, to criteria of political confidence, as occurred in Italy in the 90s and before that in the countries of northern Europe. Nevertheless, the future definition of a sphere of professional management with powers in a structured framework of authority continues to depend on local politicians with government responsibilities, and as such the traditional role of the CEOs is marked by growing uncertainty and increasing vulnerability.
**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**GLOSSARY**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS:** the municipal managers that hold posts at the apex of the administrative system of the city halls and, as such, serve as a link between this and the political sphere, providing essential management skills to local authorities characterised by their provision of a wide range of services to the citizens. These actors play a leading role in municipal management - the true, anonymous leaders of their respective corporations, with responsibility for managing the administrative machinery that ensures political decisions are implemented.

**COLLECTIVE-LEADERSHIP MODEL:** in the collective-leadership model, adopted among others by the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, the executive decision-making centre is formed by a collegiate body, *collège des bourgmestre et échevins*, which is responsible for most of the executive functions. This executive committee is formed by the councillors and is presided over by the mayor. It is a model in which the emphasis is placed on the collective nature of leadership and not so much on professionalism or individual political leadership.

**COUNCIL-MANAGER MODEL:** in the countries in which this model is adopted, all the executive functions are in the hands of a professional manager, the city-manager, who is appointed by the municipal council. The mayor acts solely as the president of the council – generally on a part-time basis - and fulfils what is basically a representative and ceremonial role, even though he or she might lead the party with the majority of seats in this assembly. This is the model adopted in Finland and Ireland, and also in Norway, Australia and by many local governments in the United States.

**LEADERSHIP-BY-COMMITTEE MODEL:** in the countries in which this model is adopted – Denmark and Sweden, the mixture of the three characteristics that define the organisation of local authorities - the council/assembly has to control the government or executive; a political actor must be entrusted with the political leadership of the government; and they must be supported by a professional manager – is greater than that found in the other countries and models. The importance of the CEOs in terms of their authority and decision-making powers is high.

**NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT:** the doctrine of New Public Management holds that governance should be based on management principles rather than on public law. As such, it stands in marked opposition to the old bureaucratic paradigm rooted in the Weberian model, while offering considerably more than just a number of technical innovations for application in public management.
STRONG-MAYOR MODEL: model of local government adopted in countries such as Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, in which the executive leadership is assumed by a politician - the mayor - and not by a professional.

WEBERIAN MODEL: «in those public systems in which we find – as is the case of the advanced democracies – the basic elements constituting a professional administration, public action has been distributed for decades in accordance with the well-known Weberian model, between two main protagonists: a political class, invested with authority by the mechanisms of representative democracy, and a professional public function, governed by a system based on merit. The appearance of managers signifies a break with this dualism - deeply entrenched over the years - not only in the functioning of governments but in the very social conscience» (LONGO, 1999: 12).