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## ***Investigating public governance models in Slovenia and Japan: a comparative survey on state and local government***

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**Abstract:** Public administration and governance must adapt to the changing socio-economic environment, improving quality, process efficiency, and collaboration. Hence, public administration and public governance models have been significantly modified multiple times, resulting in differences in public governance practices. This paper examines different public governance models' principles in Slovene and Japanese public administration. It quantifies elements based on the models' principles and applies them to an empirical case using a survey of 55 Slovene and 135 Japanese public managers. The independent samples t-test examines the differences in characteristics of public governance practices between state administration and local government in Slovenia and Japan. The results show that state administration institutions in both countries are strongly characterised by the (Neo)Weberian model's principles, while Slovenia's local government leans towards Digital-era governance (DEG) and good governance (GG) principles. Japan's state and local administrations show equal presence of New public management (NPM), DEG, and GG models. The study aims to bridge a research gap by providing new findings on how different public governance models can be found at various Slovene and Japanese public administration levels and offers insights for public managers and policymakers for future public administration reforms.

**Keywords:** public governance models, comparative analysis, Slovenia, Japan.

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## **Introduction**

Global socio-economic changes, environmental issues and the intertwining of foreign and domestic politics have had a significant impact on all areas of human development, creating challenges also for public administration and requiring changes through improved productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, increased collaboration, etc. (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021; Hammerschmid et al., 2019; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Furthermore, recent administrative reforms have involved the modification of intergovernmental dynamics. This can be attributed, in part, to the widespread implementation of 'new public management' reforms, which have gradually emerged globally. The primary objective of these reforms was to enable individual levels of government to distinguish between the political-democratic aspect of governance and the managerial-service-oriented sector. Additionally, these reforms have aimed to alleviate the rigid and authoritative nature that characterised prior intergovernmental relationships (Peters & Pierre, 2001).

Hence, all levels of public administration needed to respond to and act on growing concerns about the environmental crisis, global financial difficulties, digital demands, globalisation, migration and other challenges and will need to continue to do so. As a result of such significant issues, public administration and public governance models have been transformed several times to adapt to the changing environment. Consequently, current public administration organisations are likely to confront a variety of governing philosophies, structures, needs and cultural aspects simultaneously (Iacovino et al., 2017). Administrative reforms are multifaceted and might result in differences in public governance practices in public administration organisations, combining different structures and principles that coexist (Olsen, 2007) because specific trends of previous governance models remain when new model ideas arrive (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Aristovnik et al., 2022). We can observe three main pillars in the development of public governance models, starting with (i) the traditional public administration (the Weberian public administration); (ii) followed by the managerial model (New Public Management (NPM)); and (iii) the third pillar, for which the scientific community has yet to arrive at a consensus. The shifting agenda has seen different emphases for the third pillar – different governance models and also so-called hybrid models (Neo-Weberian State (NWS), Good Governance (GG), New Public Governance (NPG), Digital-Era Governance (DEG), Collaborative Governance and more) (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Osborne, 2006; Iacovino et al., 2017).

The impact of administrative reforms on intergovernmental relationships varies significantly between national contexts. This paper investigates the perspective of the impact of administrative reforms on intergovernmental relationships and the presence of different governance models' principles in the national context of Slovenia and Japan. The rise of multi-level governance can be primarily attributed to the fiscal crisis that has affected numerous Western countries in recent decades, resulting in a weakened state. This crisis has impacted each level of government differently, altering their interrelationships. An illustrative example can be observed

in Japan, where the state previously utilised financial incentives to steer subnational governments. However, with the state's inability to provide such incentives, regional and local institutions have gradually transitioned towards alternative models of governance that prioritise inclusivity (Peters & Pierre, 2001). In Slovenia, the state faces challenges from transnational entities like the European Union, prompting the government to become more assertive in expanding its economic foundations. Consequently, the partial withdrawal of the state creates novel opportunities for local governance (Le Galès & Harding, 1998).

Both countries have implemented political and public administrative reforms, public sector management reform, and decentralisation. The authors collaborated on the bilateral project with the purpose of bridging the research gap of empirical measurement of intergovernmental relations and comparing state and local governance models' principles in the Japanese and Slovenian contexts, driven by the following research question: What is the situation on the presence of different principles of governing in the selected countries and how does the local level differ from the state level? Being aware of the layering concept when it comes to public governance models adoption (Iacovino et al., 2017), our objective is to try to limit the effect as much as feasibly possible; hence we have chosen, upon the literature review, the most characteristic principles that are associated with each of the selected models according to the theoretical and policy frameworks and how models got translated into the praxis. No prior research has been conducted on this subject for the selected countries. Therefore, the second objective is to complement the existing state-level indices (e.g. World governance indicators) with an organisational-level perspective.

On this foundation, the paper aims to empirically verify the presence of different public governance models' principles in different levels of public administration in Slovenia and Japan. Quantifiable elements are applied to an empirical case based on a sample of 55 Slovene and 135 Japanese managers of public administration institutions. The empirical analysis examines the presence of different governance models' principles at state and local levels of public administration.

In the continuation, we present a literature review (Section 1) overviewing public administration reforms in Slovenia and Japan. We continue with the materials and methods in Section 2. Section 3 presents the main results with a discussion, and Section 4 provides a conclusion.

## **1. Public administration reforms in Slovenia and Japan**

Slovenia's development before World War II was heavily influenced by German and Austrian cultural, political, administrative, and legal traditions, as it was situated in Central Europe. This influence continued during the socialist era in Yugoslavia, where the state had significant control over society. Public administration was considered a tool for implementing national policies within the socialist system. After gaining independence in 1991, Slovenia experienced rapid development in the following years (Kovač & Virant, 2011). However, the legacy of the past still affects

the functioning and reforms of public administration, as it is viewed primarily through government policies and public law. The system (also known as Weberian public administration (Weber, 1946)) is characterised by the rule of law, division of powers, separation of public and private law and judiciary, as well as elements of liberalism (Raadschelders, 2011; Koprić, 2012). The principles of the European Administrative Space also played a significant role in Slovene's public administration reforms (Kovač & Virant, 2011; Kovač & Bileišis, 2017). In general, within public administration reform processes, Slovenia undertook the path of revolution (1990–1994), transition (1995–1997), and EU accession and integration (1996–2004), further continuous modernisation of the political-administrative system through specific policies (2003–2008), and adjustments to cope with the economic crisis (2008–2015; similarly to other countries in the region (Cardona & Freibert, 2007; Koprić, 2011)). The reforms have been developed using various governmental strategies, following a predominantly neo-liberal approach and incorporating elements of New Public Management. Despite aiming to implement some good governance principles, such as customer orientation and delegation of powers to regulatory agencies, the public administration reforms have been carried out in a legalistic manner (Kovač & Gajduschek, 2015). In terms of local government, a comprehensive reform was implemented at the end of 1994, strictly separating the roles of local communities and state administration by constitutional provisions. Local communities took on the responsibility of regulating public matters of local significance, such as communal services, spatial planning, primary healthcare, and education. On the other hand, the state administration assumed the task of enforcing laws and other regulations of national importance (Kovač & Virant, 2011).

The instances of public administration reforms in several countries, including Slovenia and Japan, show that the backgrounds of these reforms have similar characteristics. European Union member countries have been implementing various public reform policies, from reorganising government, updating the budgeting process, rationalising financial policies, changes in human resource management, public management and public service delivery to reviewing public-private partnerships and introducing the use of information and communication technology to improve the administrative business process. NPM has emerged as one of the essential keywords and guidelines in these reforms. Accountability and transparency are vitally desirable not only for European integration but also for Japanese domestic purposes (Kudo, 2003; Androniceanu, 2021; Androniceanu and Georgescu, 2023). Even though NPM was developed from Anglo-Saxon experiences, it has been uniquely implemented in Japan since the late 1990s. The public budget crisis, the pressing need for public sector reform and political instability resulted in two options: bureaucratic self-reform or citizen empowerment and the resulting pressure on the bureaucracy. The first option culminated in reorganising and restructuring certain administrative organisations and establishing a legal framework and operational system for performance assessment and policy review (Kudo, 2003). NPM was introduced into a traditional type of public administration with a long

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history (beginning with the Dajokan system in 1868 (Tsuji, 1982)) and altered its managerial style with several business management techniques. Because of these tendencies, reform in public service delivery has compelled public sector organisations to outsource part of their functions, privatise the enterprises and reconsider the role of government in response to the role of the private sector and civil society (Kudo, 2003). Japan's local autonomy is based on the Local Autonomy Law, enacted in 1947 and the Constitution of Japan, adopted in 1946 and took effect the following year (CLAIR, 2021). Many Japanese local governments introduced NPM in the late nineties before the national government and its academic introduction. After a decade of NPM experiences, however, some local governments began to distance themselves from the NPM-driven management approach. After evaluating performance and consumer satisfaction, some opted to return the service to public administration or to develop new forms of partnership between the public and private sectors and not to renew contracts with the private sector. There is evidence that some local governments have already transitioned from NPM-driven management to post-NPM or New Public Governance (NPG) orientation (Kudo, 2015). Additionally, although the constitution of Japan allows for local autonomy and despite a major decentralisation reform in the 1990s – 2000s, there still remains a centralised policy-making structure (Vatter, 2004; Masujima, 2005).

## **2. Materials and methods**

The survey target group was public managers from Japanese and Slovenian public administration organisations. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used to obtain the respondents from the target group. A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared to address the selected segment regarding authority and service orientation to gather information on the current state of functioning and governance. The questionnaire encompassed numerous aspects of the administrative organisation, tailored to the core organisational elements and principles of public administration governance. The survey was conducted between 2019 and 2021 through personal interviews with public managers, allowing for a critical assessment of individual question items. Participants were assured that the survey was strictly confidential and anonymous. The final sample consisted of 55 Slovene and 135 Japanese managers of public administration institutions (see Table 1). Finally, the respondents were not required to complete the entire questionnaire; therefore, the number of respondents varied by question.

**Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the survey respondents and institutions**

Sociodemographic characteristics	Number (%/SD)	
	SI	JP
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	28 (50.9)	97 (74.0)

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Sociodemographic characteristics	Number (%/SD)	
	SI	JP
Female	27 (49.1)	34 (26.0)
<b>Years of employment at the institution</b>		
Mean (SD)	10.1 (8.4)	16.6 (10.6)
<b>Years of employment in the current workplace</b>		
Mean (SD)	4.3 (5.2)	2.8 (3.3)
<b>Years of employment in the previous workplace</b>		
Mean (SD)	6.6 (5.0)	3.3 (2.5)
<b>Total years of work experience</b>		
Mean (SD)	22.9 (8.6)	17.5 (10.2)
<b>Type of institutions</b>		
Ministries - directorates	29 (52.7)	10 (7.4)
Bodies within ministries	11 (20.0)	11 (8.1)
Municipal administrations	15 (27.3)	114 (84.4)
<b>Level of public administration</b>		
State administration	40 (72.7)	21 (15.6)
Local government	15 (27.3)	114 (84.4)

Note: The final sample consists of 55 Slovene and 135 Japanese participants. SD—standard deviation.

According to the sociodemographic characteristics, the sample's structure was as follows. Considering gender, 50.9% of the respondents were male, 49.1% were female in Slovenia, 74.0% were male, and 26.0% were female in Japan. For Slovenia, the average years of employment at the institution were 10.1, and the average years employed in the current and previous workplace were 4.3 and 6.6, respectively. In contrast, the average total work experience was 22.9 years. In Japan, the average years of employment at the institution were 16.6, and the average years employed in the current and previous workplace were 2.8 and 3.3, respectively. In contrast, the average total work experience was 17.5 years. Most respondents came from ministries–directorates (52.7%), followed by municipal administrations (27.3%) and bodies within ministries (20.0%) in Slovenia. In Japan, the majority of respondents came from municipal administration (84.4%), followed by bodies within ministries (8.1%) and ministries-directorates (7.4%). In Slovenia, the largest percentage of respondents came from state administration (72.7%), i.e., ministries-directorates and bodies within ministries, while the remainder were from local government (27.3%), i.e., municipal administrations. Quite the contrary, in Japan,

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the largest respondent share came from the local government (84.4%) and 15.5% from the state administration.

A questionnaire of 115 closed-ended question items was used to collect the data, with six questions about respondents' basic demographic characteristics and 109 questions referring to the organisation's functioning, grouped into seven thematic sections (see Table 2). The first thematic segment included eleven question items about values and objectives for the organisation's future. The second section featured eleven question items concerning strategy and leadership. The following section contained twenty-one questions about structure and processes that addressed various areas of the organisation's operation. The fourth section covered organisational culture and included nine questions about the values, attitudes, and practices that distinguish an organisation. The fifth section was about changes and development and comprised seven questions concerning the organisation's adaptation capacity. The following section addressed cooperation with the environment, with thirty-seven questions concerning direct stakeholders' engagement in decision-making processes. Finally, the last section included thirteen questions on results, representing achievements expressed through various quantitative or qualitative indicators. The questionnaire's content was developed using a theoretical literature review conducted by academic economics, law, and public administration experts. It was then tested, amended, and assessed using practical experiences and recommendations from public managers. Individual dimensions of a public manager's assessment of organisational functioning (e.g., agreement or frequency) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (lowest value) to 5 (highest value) (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). Since the surveyed types of organisations varied, an extra option, "not applicable," was offered (Aristovnik et al., 2022).

**Table 2. Thematic sections in the questionnaire with the number of questions**

	Name of the thematic section	No. of questions
0/7	Demographic data	6
1/7	Values and goals	11
2/7	Leadership and strategy	11
3/7	Structure and processes	21
4/7	Organisational culture	9
5/7	Changes and development	7
6/7	Cooperation with the environment	37
7/7	Results	13

Note: The questionnaire consisted of 115 questions altogether.

For the t-test, the statistical analysis was conducted using the Scipy Python library (Seabold et al., 2010). The initial phase of the study involved selecting suitable items that best represent the characteristics of specific public governance models, namely the (Neo)Weberian model (WEB), New Public Management (NPM), Good Governance (GG), and Digital-Era Governance (DEG). To ensure comprehensive coverage of the theoretical scope of these constructs (Hair et al., 2010), the three

most relevant items for each public governance model were identified (refer to Table 3). The process of selecting the most appropriate items involved a theoretical examination that considered the prominent public governance principles associated with each specific model:

The key principles of the (Neo)Weberian model encompass various aspects, including hierarchical accountability, adherence to the rule of law, legitimacy, uniformity, standardisation of procedures, limited communication channels, division of labour, etc. (Weber, 1946; Wojciech, 2017; Dunleavy & Margetts, 2015). Despite being approximately century old, certain elements of this model remain crucial even today. These include maintaining a hierarchical structure, professionalism, and the political neutrality of public administration, which operates in accordance with relevant legislation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Bauer & Trondal, 2015; Ropret & Aristovnik, 2019; Kukovič & Justinek, 2020).

New public management (NPM) involved adopting entrepreneurial and managerial approaches from the private sector and their implementation within public institutions. This approach regarded citizens as customers and emphasised enhancing the productivity of public bureaucracies and management. As a result, the concept of "managerialism" emerged with the following principles: efficiency, effectiveness, deregulation, performance measurement, competitiveness, cost reduction, entrepreneurship, etc. (Pollitt, 1990; Bach & Bordogna, 2011; Bovaird & Löffler, 2003; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

Following a decade of experimental implementation of New Public Management, concerns and reservations began to arise. As a response, countries in continental Europe opted to introduce changes to the Weberian model, incorporating new elements for more contemporary governance, such as Good Governance (OECD, 2004). This approach emphasises eight fundamental principles, including participation, the rule of law, efficiency, transparency, equity, effectiveness, equality, etc. (OECD, 2004, Androniceanu, 2021)). Good Governance promotes the concept of a "well-functioning bureaucracy" where administrative operations, along with other societal networks, facilitate coordination, moving away from a monopolistic hierarchical authority held solely by the state administration (Peters, 2012). It suggests operating through networking and open structures, departing from a top-down approach (Bevir, 2011).

Digital-Era Governance introduces a new dimension to Good Governance by emphasising the collaboration between citizens and public administration, a facet that previous models had not fully achieved. It places digital technologies at the core of administrative organisational structures (Baheer et al., 2020; Wojciech, 2017; Androniceanu, 2023). The Digital-Era Governance model is characterised by three key features: reintegration in terms of public administration architecture, a citizen-centred approach based on needs, and the transformative impact of digitalisation (Androniceanu et al., 2022). This shift towards digitalisation leads to the provision of online public services directly to citizens, eliminating the need for intermediaries (Cho & Melisa, 2021; Dunleavy et al., 2006; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013; Wojciech, 2017; Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2023).



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The second phase entailed calculating mean values for survey data for each public governance model. Finally, to identify differences in mean values between state administration and local government in Slovenia and Japan, an independent samples t-test was performed. This particular parametric statistical technique is widely recognised as a highly reliable method and is frequently employed to identify differences in mean values between two independent samples (Rasch et al., 2007; Aristovnik et al., 2022).

**Table 3. Selected items per public governance model and assigned principles**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Principle</b>
<b>WEB</b>	
The functioning of our institution is based on clear rules.	RULE
As a manager, I ensure consistent adherence to the rules in our institution.	RULE
Our institution places great emphasis on internal control.	RULE
<b>NPM</b>	
In the functioning of our institution, we emulate all relevant good practices from the private sector.	EFEF
We thoroughly monitor the achievement of our institution's goals through indicators.	EFEF
Key decisions are based on the relationship between inputs and expected economic and social benefits.	EFEF
<b>GG</b>	
The process of cooperation between us and the public is based on a continuous basis.	PART
The public is directly involved in key decision-making and does not only have a consultative role.	RESP
In implementing key decisions, we are committed to reaching a consensus of all relevant stakeholders.	CONS
<b>DEG</b>	
Our information system combines all the data necessary for our functioning.	EFEF
Our key business processes are supported by state-of-the-art digital solutions.	EFEF
We use modern digital solutions when working with customers.	EFEF

Note: WEB—Weberian model; NPM—New Public Management; GG—Good Governance; DEG—Digital-Era Governance; RULE—the rule of law; EFEF—efficiency and effectiveness; PART—participation; RESP—responsiveness; CONS—consensus-oriented.

### 3. Results and discussion

The paper examines the overall presence of different public governance models' principles in public administration in Slovenia and Japan. The additional examination considers that various levels of public administration possess different characteristics closely related to their particular area of operation. Accordingly, a comparison of mean values was utilised to establish differences in the presence of different public governance models' principles between state administration (ministries - directorates and bodies within ministries) and local government organisations (municipal administration) in Slovenia and Japan. Combining

theoretical foundation and empirical findings shows there are principles of several public governance models simultaneously present in state and local government organisations, creating a complex situation. Specific influences of previous models, or rather influences of models adopted in previous years, remained and are today intertwined with newer approaches brought by different governance models layered on top of one another.

The results show the characteristics and principles of (at least) four different public governance models differently present in Slovenian and Japanese public administration. The public managers reported the main principles of the Weberian model measured to be more present at the state level in both countries (see Figure 1). Several Weberian model elements remain indispensable, like the public administration's hierarchy, professionalism, and political neutrality operating according to legislation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Bauer & Trondal, 2015; Ropret & Aristovnik, 2019). The results show that significant differences in public governance practices exist between selected segments of Japanese public administration in the mean values for state administration ( $M = 4.32$ ) and local self-government ( $M = 3.94$ ), revealing that public managers tend to experience the practices of the traditional public governance model more prominently in the state administration institutions. The proportions are the same in Slovenia, with the state level showing more elements of Weberian governance than the local level; however, the differences are not significant; in fact, the local level in Slovenia is also prominently characterised by the Weberian model ( $M = 4.29$ ), showing slight difference (0.12) between the levels, which is evident also from the Table 4. The prevalence of the (Neo)Weberian elements in Slovenia is not evident only in theoretical developments but also from our data, proving that Eastern European and German-oriented territory and their traditions are the most influential for the Slovenian environment, having a similar development regarding (Neo)Weberian model (Kovač & Gajduschek, 2015; Kovač & Jukić, 2015). Based on the Japanese constitution, local governments in Japan have the authority to enact ordinances within the boundaries of the law. However, in many ways, the central ministries are "superordinate" and supervise local administrations. Top-down supervision is robust concerning implementing central programs (Vatter, 2004), reflected in the results, especially in ensuring rule adherence at the state level.

New public management elements are moderately more prominently evaluated by the public managers at the state level, more so in Slovenia, whereas in Japan, the difference between the levels is 0.12. Overall, however, the managerial principles are similarly present at both levels in both countries. Objectives monitoring, however, is visibly more frequent at the state level in Slovenia. At the national level, NPM has been taken from its Anglo-Saxon experiences and implemented in Japan uniquely since the late 90s. Establishing a legal framework was one of the results of national efforts toward policy evaluation, considered one of the most essential aspects and instruments for realising NPM in Japan (Kudo, 2003).

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**Table 4. Selected items per public governance model and assigned principles**

<b>Weberian public administration</b>	Principle	SLO	JP
The functioning of our institution is based on clear rules.	RULE	-0,09	-0,04
As a manager, I ensure consistent adherence to the rules in our institution.	RULE	0,27	0,72
Our institution places great emphasis on internal control.	RULE	0,16	0,41

Note: RULE—the rule of law; Mean differences between state and local government organisations in Slovenia and Japan, with positives prevailing at the state level and negatives on the local level.

A series of techniques were delivered from business management, with reorganisation and restructuring of PA organisations and policy evaluation. Many Japanese local governments introduced NPM in the late nineties before the national government and its academic introduction. Most of them introduced performance measurement, programme evaluation, citizen-customer and employee satisfaction survey, outcome orientation, outsourcing and/or contracting out to the private sector and/or social sector, revision of public service delivery, private finance initiative (PFI), and public and private partnership (PPP), following the Anglo-Saxon examples (Oosumi, 1999; Kudo, 2003; Kudo, 2015). However, after a decade of these experiences, some local governments were starting to distance themselves from the NPM-driven managerial style. Similar tendencies are evident for Slovenian PA, despite the largely disseminated Total Quality Management schemes and primary orientation toward NPM principles, even in the latest document adopted by the Slovenian government in 2015 (Strategy of Slovenian PA 2015–2020) (GOV, 2015). 50% of public managers in Slovenia and 45,9% in Japan (both levels combined) responded with “occasionally”, a neutral option on a 5-point Likert scale when asked whether their organisation imitates all relevant good practices from the private sector.

**Table 5. Selected items per public governance model and assigned principles**

<b>New public management</b>	Principle	SLO	JP
In the functioning of our institution, we emulate all relevant good practices from the private sector.	EFEF	-0,05	0,19
We thoroughly monitor the achievement of our institution's goals through indicators.	EFEF	0,43	0,10
Key decisions are based on the relationship between inputs and expected economic and social benefits.	EFEF	0,18	0,04

Note: EFEF—efficiency and effectiveness; Mean differences between state and local government organisations in Slovenia and Japan, with positives prevailing at the state level and negatives on the local level.

The shift away from NPM practices and towards governance approaches is evident in both countries. In Japan, there is a minimum difference between NPM and GG for both levels, showing the public managers' equal evaluation of the models'

principles' presence after the decline of NPM practices and the implementation of more GG. The progression in Japan even turned towards New public governance, one of the models under the "governance" umbrella that introduced "citizen-centric" and network governance, guaranteeing active participation of stakeholders in decision-making as well as public service delivery through "joined-up governance" (Osborne, 2006; Bovaird, 2007; Osborne, 2010). According to Kudo (2015) and Bakvis and Jarvis (2012), some explanations for this shift can be found in 1) putting more importance on citizen participation than cost cutting, 2) preference for PPP over simple outsourcing, and 3) consideration of political accountability in administrative implementations. Interestingly, where NPG-driven reforms have been introduced are not recognised as NPG. Public managers in Japan are rarely aware of the theoretical transition from NPM-driven management to public practices based on governance (Kudo, 2015).

There is an insignificant difference between the levels in Japanese PA and Slovenia; however, the difference is slightly bigger in Slovenia for GG practices being evaluated more present at the local level (Figure 1). Contrary to the Japanese situation, the public managers in Slovenia are aware of the concept of good governance and good administration. Confirming the difference between state and local levels regarding GG in Slovenia, Kovač et al. (2015) measured the knowledge and understanding of GG in their 2015 survey. They confirmed visible differences between service-oriented and authoritative agencies, where over 70% of the surveyed service-oriented organisations are highly aware of the importance of good administration. In contrast, only around 30% of authoritative agencies fully respected the principles of good administration, while 15% of their public managers responded that it was "not significant for our agency" (Kovač et al., 2015). This survey included administrative units as service-oriented organisations, which were not included in our survey since such a public entity does not exist in the same format in Japan. Nevertheless, municipal administrations are also service-oriented. When considering our results for the local level, it is evident that GG practices are more commonly assessed as used than at the state level in Slovenia, especially when it comes to the involvement of the public in key decision-making; however, on the other hand, the ministries cooperate with the public in a different way than the local level. The vision of the Strategy of Slovenian PA 2015-2020 (GOV, 2015) also included the GG principles (participation, the rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus oriented, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusiveness), besides focusing on NPM practices and local level seemed to adopt them in a greater extent than the state level – at least for the aspects included in the questionnaire. However, the GG approaches are not yet fully implemented in Slovenian PA nor Japan, considering, for example, this statement from the questionnaire: The public is directly involved in key decisions and does not only have a consultative role, for which the most (37.3%) of Slovenian public managers answered with "rarely" and most (33.8%) of Japanese with "occasionally", both levels of PA combined.

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**Table 6. Selected items per public governance model and assigned principles**

<b>Good governance</b>	Principle	SLO	JP
The process of cooperation between us and the public is based on a continuous basis.	PART	-0,34	-0,38
The public is directly involved in key decision-making and does not only have a consultative role.	RESP	-0,61	0,17
In implementing key decisions, we are committed to reaching a consensus of all relevant stakeholders.	CONS	-0,19	0,37

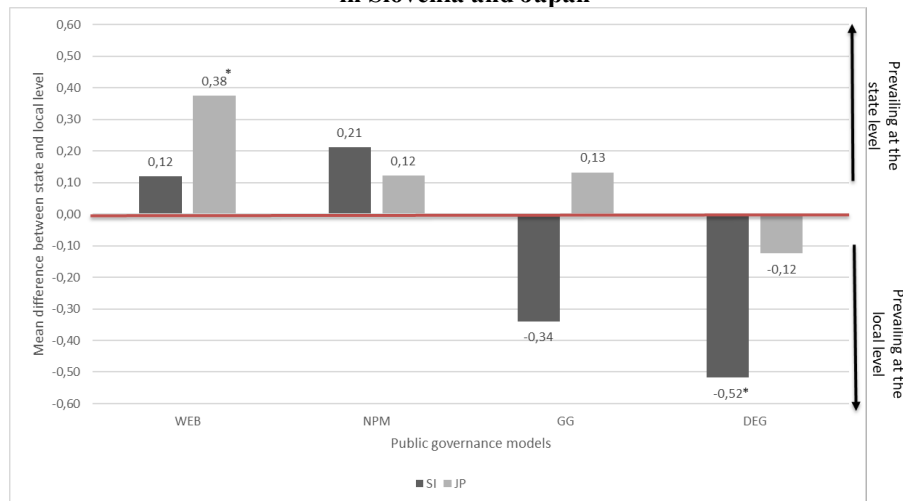
Note: PART—participation; RESP—responsiveness; CONS—consensus-oriented; Mean differences between state and local government organisations in Slovenia and Japan, with positives prevailing at the state level and negatives on the local level.

The public managers assessed digital era governance elements as more prominent on both countries' local than state levels. However, there is a significant difference between the local and state level for Slovenia, with  $M = 4,02$  for the local level and  $M = 3,5$  for the state level (see Figure 1). Our results additionally confirmed that the activities of e-government are not progressing in Japan. The Digital Agency was established in September 2021 in Japan at the national level. In the past, each ministry, agency, and local government has been promoting digitalisation separately (Androniceanu, 2023), and the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted such practice as ineffective, according to the Digital Agency (2021). However, digitalisation in Japan is lagging at the national and local levels. In the survey, more than 70% of national public employees disagree with the following statement: “Advances in information technology have greatly improved your workloads”. It may be said that digitalisation is progressing, but not in a user-friendly manner in Japan.

In Slovenia, the local level pays more attention to individual elements as well as to good administration as a whole. In addition to compliance with regulations, they develop a partnership approach to the parties, especially in terms of openness and, thus, higher ultimate performance. This is because of the clear division of responsibilities between state administration and local government, as the Local Self-Government Act in Slovenia limits the state rather than the municipality. In other words, it prevents the state from interfering in the municipalities' governing sphere. This allows the municipality to obtain the functions under authentic competence crucial for the life and work of the municipality's inhabitants. Following this approach, the functions can be exercised more effectively and rationally within the local community rather than through state administration (Vlaj, 1997; Kukovič et al., 2016; Aristovnik et al., 2022). The not-so-clear individuality of local governments in Japan can also explain the difference in results regarding DEG principles.

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**Figure 1. Mean differences between state and local government organisations in Slovenia and Japan**



Note: WEB—Weberian model; NPM—New Public Management; GG—Good Governance; DEG—Digital-Era Governance; Asterisk (\*) indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.05$ .

Our research results are consistent with previous empirical studies. For instance, Greek, Italian, and German local governments have similarly demonstrated significant efforts in modernising their local administrations (Orelli et al., 2016; Kuhlmann et al., 2008). It is worth noting that distinctions between state administration and local government can be observed within various public governance models, as local administrations tend to exhibit greater creativity, openness, and innovation (Iacovino et al., 2017; Cepiku et al., 2008; Aristovnik et al., 2022; Kóňa et al., 2022). However, even though certain DEG practices are significantly more present at the local level than at the state, the responses to several statements regarding DEG were answered with 4 (frequently or partly agree with) rather than 5 on a 5-point Likert scale, for example, statements like 1) Our information system integrates all the information we need for our functioning, 2) Our core business processes are supported by state-of-the-art digital solutions, and 3) We use modern digital solutions when working with customers, meaning there is room for improvement (see Table 7). Additionally, the statement nr. 3 is also an example of a statement targeting more service-oriented organisations, which can explain why certain DEG practices are more present at the local level in Slovenia.

**Table 7. Selected items per public governance model and assigned principles**

Digital era governance	Principle	SLO	JP
Our information system combines all the data necessary for our functioning.	EFEF	-0,50	-0,15
Our key business processes are supported by state-of-the-art digital solutions.	EFEF	-0,67	-0,32

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Digital era governance	Principle	SLO	JP
We use modern digital solutions when working with customers.	EFEF	-0,27	0,08

Note: EFEF—efficiency and effectiveness; Mean differences between state and local government organisations in Slovenia and Japan, with positives prevailing at the state level and negatives on the local level.

This study has certain limitations concerning respondents' subjective ratings, which could lead to a misinterpretation of survey items. It is reasonable to assume that some public managers may underestimate or overstate specific characteristics when responding to survey questions, especially regarding differences between Slovenian and Japanese cultures. To minimise bias, all questions related to assessing the state and potential for governance were thoroughly explained to the respondents. Another limitation is the relatively small sample size, which may impact the reliability of the findings. However, efforts were made to address this constraint by ensuring representation across various organisational subgroups based on size and geographical location. Lastly, the small sample size poses challenges in incorporating complex empirical considerations.

Despite these limitations, our findings are notable due to the limited availability of empirical research exploring the prevalence of public governance models' principles in public administration organisations, particularly in comparing state administration and local government and examining the cases of Slovenia and Japan. Regardless of their administrative responsibilities, the results underscore the importance of Slovenian and Japanese state administrations adopting modern governance approaches that foster comprehensive, informed, inter-organisational, and adaptable governance. This can be achieved by involving various stakeholders, fostering mutual trust, and enhancing effectiveness and readiness to tackle future societal challenges. Moreover, this study can serve as a foundation for future international, longitudinal, and cross-sectional comparisons and assess the progress of ongoing public administration reforms and their future development.

#### 4. Conclusions

Contemporary public sector governance models encompass a diverse amalgamation of legacy models. Public administration continues to incorporate Weberian principles as well as characteristics of New Public Management, which have subsequently evolved into post-NPM practices. In addition, there has been a partial integration of good governance principles and emerging trends from the Digital Era Governance model, albeit with variations depending on the country and administrative level. Public organisations have transformed in recent decades to adapt to societal, economic, and political changes in the post-industrial world. These organisations now face a complex landscape due to the coexistence of diverse ideas, structures, and elements that sometimes conflict. Importantly, when adopting a new governance model, it is unlikely to completely replace earlier mechanisms,

principles, ideas, and practices, further contributing to the complexity of public sector governance models.

The functioning of public administration is shaped by a combination of retained trends from previous models and emerging new ones. This process, known as layering, can be observed in empirical evidence from Japanese and Slovenian public administration, affirming the presence of theoretical concepts in practical implementation. Our study identified various components of distinct public governance models in the public administrations of Japan and Slovenia. The core of their state administration institutions revolves around the practices of the (Neo)Weberian model, which is characterised by a centralised approach and a hierarchical organisational structure. The other three models, NPM, GG and DEG, have a minimal difference between the levels in Japan, with NPM and GG being more commonly present at the state level and DEG at the local. In Slovenia, managerial public governance practices are more prominent at the state level, whereas elements of GG and significantly more also DEG elements on the local level. More elements of DEG are implemented in service-oriented authorities in both countries that see less conflict between public and private interests. The local level also uses more GG elements than the state in Slovenia, as the local government pays more attention to individual elements and good administration as a whole.

This paper attempts to support countries like Slovenia, Japan, and others in pursuing effective governance approaches by exploring the evolution of public governance models. The objective is to align with broader environmental developments and cater to modern societal changes and needs, including citizen engagement, globalisation, and the impact of digitalisation. The study involved examining theoretical paradigms and comparing them with administrative practices at both the state and local levels in Japan and Slovenia. By incorporating contemporary elements, the research aims to equip public managers with additional resources to facilitate democratic and efficient governance. The reported findings provide policymakers with valuable insights that can contribute to shaping the direction of future public administration reforms. Ultimately, the goal is to adapt governance models to meet the evolving challenges and requirements of today's world.

#### **Conflict of interest.**

There is no conflict of interest.

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