

Sistemas administrativos comparados. By SALVADOR PARRADO. Madrid: Tecnos/ Universidad Pompeu Fabra 2002, Pp. 266, index, biblio. 17 € (paper) ISBN 84-309-3833-8.

As the inscription in the beginning reveals, this is still another work dedicated to the memory of Vincent Wright, the comparativist who left his imprint on a number of young Spanish scholars interested in the comparative study of administration and policy. The author, at the Spanish Distance Learning University (UNED), has produced a very ambitious book that, in design, scope and end result, is the first of its kind in the Spanish language, and is arguably unique for English and continental languages as well. Unlike most of the few existing books on comparative public administration in Britain or the Continent, this is a single-authored thematic comparison, written from an historical-institutionalist analytical perspective, that presents and compares the features of six nations, seeking to understand similarities and differences among the tendencies found in the structures and processes of their administrative systems.

Drawing on the insights of Peters or Loughlin on the importance of state traditions, Parrado convincingly justifies the selection of his cases from the four Western state traditions: Napoleonic (France and Italy), Prussian (Germany), Scandinavian (Sweden), and Anglo Saxon (United Kingdom and the United States). Throughout the book, the author focuses on two recurring leitmotifs that underlie the exposition: the fragmentation processes —devolution of powers to territorial units, transfer of services to autonomous agencies and non-government actors—, and the coordination mechanisms that different national governments have devised to avoid the negative consequences of fragmentation, reflected in organisational matters (core executives), human resources (civil service elites), and intergovernmental relations. The book has eight chapters. The introduction outlines a general framework for understanding the country chapters. Then, the examination of each administrative system follows a similar structure, presenting 1) the constitutional and party-political context of the administrative system, 2) the analysis of the central administration with a special focus on the division of labour between ministries and agencies, and the role of the core executive in coordinating public actions, 3) the role of the civil service (especially political and administrative elites), 4) the territorial distribution of power and the patterns of intergovernmental relations; 5) the recent administrative reforms and how do they fit into the system. The final chapter offers a comparative overview.

Much of the strength of this book lies, first, in the coherence it exhibits in addressing the issues, only achievable by a single author. Second, country specific chapters are accompanied by solid cross-country comparisons in the introduction and conclusions that corroborate the value of systematic comparison vis-à-vis simply parallel presentation or multi-authored juxtapositions. The third merit lies in the extensive book's research base, since the author competently employs sources in five languages providing the reader with an updated and substantial bibliography. All these merits of the book notwithstanding, at least three limitations can be pointed out: first, the relationships between public administration and civil society, political culture and public opinion should be given more attention; second, the transfer of state functions to non-governmental organisations is well covered for the United Kingdom but would require some more in-depth coverage for the other countries. Finally, on the issue of coordination, the author promises more than he

delivers, maybe due to the fact that researching the coordination of a whole system it is not an easy task. Be that as it may, *Sistemas administrativos comparados* has plenty of virtues that would warrant a translation for English readers, and it should be a recommended reading not just for advanced graduate or postgraduate students of public administration but also for courses concerned with the training of international or supranational civil servants in Europe.

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