

Explaining Variety in the Regulation of Local Public Services

A New Institutional Analysis of the Water Sector

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1. Introduction

Across countries and sectors, local governments differ significantly in the way in which they organize, manage, and regulate local public services. Institutional arrangements for regulating local public services – such as water, gas, transport, and urban waste collection – include direct public ownership and control, franchises, discretionary regulation, and liberalization subject to «minimal» regulation of access and quality. Why does this variety of institutional arrangements exist? What affects the kind of regulatory institutions that local governments adopt for the delivery of local public services? These issues are still relatively unsettled. Empirical evidence shows that these institutional arrangements also vary over time, with countries occasionally implementing reforms concerning how local public services are regulated. Evidence concerning which kind of regulatory system better performs with respect to the others, however, are still relatively inconclusive and in short supply.

This paper aims to partially address these issues by addressing the question of whether the country-specific institutional environment plays any role in the variety of institutional arrangements for regulating local public services. This question is tackled from the perspective of New Institutional Economics (NIE), a field of economics which places particular attention on the importance of institutions on behavior and economic performance (North, 1991; Williamson, 1985). The analysis is conducted by contrasting and comparing the institutional environments and the institutional arrangements for the regulation of the water industry in four main EU countries, namely Germany, France, the UK, and Italy. As in other local public service industries, the water one is characterized by significantly different water regulatory institutions across countries (Barraqué, 1995; Balance and Taylor, 2005; Rouse, 2007). Each of these four countries presents quite specific institutional environments, i.e., the allocation of regulatory functions between public authorities and the extent to which property rights can be authoritatively reconfigured. All of these countries, moreover, are also affected by common policy orientations as stipulated at the EU level (e.g., Water Framework Directive).

The paper is organized in four sections. Section 2 will illustrate the theoretical framework for the comparative analysis of the regulation of water services across countries. Section 3 will examine the characteristics of the regulation of the water sectors in Germany, France, the UK, and Italy. Apart from constituting the four largest economies in Europe, these countries have been selected because the respective water regulatory systems are commonly taken as 'benchmark ca-

ses' for discussion on how local governments' provision of water services should be regulated, in both academic and professional circles (Ballance and Taylor, 2005; Rouse, 2007). Section 4 will contrast and compare the institutional differences between the water sector in the four countries. Finally, section 5 will draw the conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

Following Williamson (1975, 1985, 1996), North (1991), and Glachant and Finon (1999), institutions which affect the regulation of water service provision are distinguished between the internal economic institutions with which the sector is endowed (the «institutional arrangement») and the external institutions which characterize the country context (the «institutional environment»). The internal institutions which are most significant for contrasting and comparing the regulation of water service provision relate to the industry's vertical integration, horizontal integration, and ownership structure (Glachant and Finon, 1999).

First, the degree of vertical integration of the water industry depends on the ways in which asset specificity, natural monopoly conditions, and externalities and measurement problems affect the execution of transactions. The water sector is characterized by high level of asset specificity because water is transported along site-specific infrastructure which connects producers and consumers. In the absence of third-party access to infrastructure and common carriage regulation, vertical integration of most – if not all – of the industry is a common institution of the water sector. The water sector is also characterized by natural monopoly conditions in both production, transport and distribution because of sub-additive production cost function and sunk costs, which provides additional incentives towards vertical integration (Gómez Ibáñez, 2003). The water sector is also characterized by externalities in both production and consumption, which are particularly exacerbated by droughts and sanitation deficits, and by problems of measurement of water quality and service performance. Externalities and measurement problems undermine the execution of transactions and call for a centralized system for the coordination of production, transport, and distribution activities.

Second, the degree of horizontal integration of the water industry depends on the extent to which incumbents dominate industry segments and entry of other operators is forestalled by legal or other means. In the production segment, horizontal integration is typically high because of scarcity of resources (i.e., groundwater springs) or constraints placed on the construction of dams because of environmental concerns (Massarutto, 2007), high sunk costs, and installed excess capacity, which raise the barriers to entry to the industry (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). Also in the transport segment (i.e., medium-long range transport of water through aqueducts) vertical integration is typically high because of the natural monopoly condition of the infrastructure network and of the unfeasibility of common carriage (Noll et al., 2000; Spulber and Sabbaghi, 1994). In principle, the local distribution segment (i.e., medium-short range supply of water in urban

areas) and the sewage and wastewater treatment segments may be open to competition between operators, either through mechanisms of franchise allocation (i.e., competition for the field) or yardstick competition between fragmented service territories. In practice, however, also these segments of the water industry are often horizontally integrated into incumbent firms which typically enjoy the benefits of upstream vertical integration.

Third, the ownership structure relates to the quality of the owners (i.e., private or public entities) and relative share of property of the water firms. The role of the ownership structure on the conduct and performance of water firms has been widely researched. Some studies showed that public ownership water firms perform better than private ones (Bhattacharyya et al., 1994; Araral, 2009), while others found that private water utilities slightly outperform public ones (Faria et al., 2005), while others resulted in no clear difference between the two types (Bel and Warner, 2008; Kirkpatrick et al., 2006; Estache and Rossi, 2002). Various works highlighted that, rather than ownership, other factors better account for performance differences between water firms, such as transaction costs (Ménard and Saussier, 2000), benchmark competition (Wallsten and Kosec, 2008), appropriate governance (Araral, 2008), and corporate governance, financial management and operations management (Xun, 2008). Although ownership structure is a component part of the institutional arrangements of the water sector, on the whole it seems to play a minor role in determining water firms' conduct and performance.

The external institutions include both formal institutions (e.g., the country's constitutional, legal, and administrative framework) and informal ones (e.g., values, ideologies, customs) (North, 1991; Glachant and Finon, 1999). Formal institutions are particularly important in this context, because they determine the feasibility of alternative institutional arrangements of the water sector (Shirley, 1995; Weingast, 1995). Different institutional environments better support alternative institutional arrangements in terms of compatibility between the design of water institutions and the country's institutional framework. It is important, then, to focus on selected features of the institutional environment that may enable or hamper the re-regulation of the water sector, i.e., the change of rules, the vertical and/or horizontal restructuring of the industry, and the reconfiguration of ownership structures.

External formal institutions of different countries are distinguished on the basis of the allocation of regulatory functions between public authorities and of the extent to which property rights can be authoritatively reconfigured (Glachant and Finon, 1999). The regulatory functions may be variously allocated between the central government, sub-national governments, and regulatory authorities. Federal parliamentary countries may be expected to allow more decentralization of regulatory functions than unitary countries with strong executive, especially if they are characterized by unstable coalition governments. The possibility to reconfigure property rights ranges from «light touch» provisions (e.g., those which mandate accounting or legal separation between organizational units) to more substantive reallocations (e.g., those which provide ownership unbundling or

mandatory mergers or acquisitions). Diffused public ownership among local governments, in particular, may be expected to resist centrally mandated reconfiguration of property rights.

3. The regulation of water service provision in four EU countries

3.1. Water service provision in the UK

Current regulation of water service provision in the UK originated from the 1989 Water Act, which provided the privatization of the former 10 Regional Water Authorities (RWAs). The privatization of the water firms, which was mainly intended to attract private capital to fund infrastructure development, to improve efficiency, to provide better value for the consumers (Gómez Ibáñez. 2003), and to reduce the presence of the State and the bureaucracy in the economy (Summerton, 1998), resulted in a relatively concentrated industry structure characterized by full private ownership. The shares of the RWAs were sold through flotation in the stock market in 1989, while the 26 private water supply firms which operated at that time (so-called Statutory Water Companies) were required to reincorporate as public limited companies. From 1989 onwards, both the privatized RWAs and the former Statutory Water Companies were subject to a new regulatory system mostly centered on discretionary regulation conducted by a national regulatory authority (Office of Water Services or OFWAT).

This system of discretionary regulation centered on the relationship between the regulator and the regulated firms. The 1989 Water Act provided that the privatized water companies operate in a near-monopolist regime under a license (called Instrument of Appointment) granted by the Secretary of State of the Environment, and that new entrants may be granted water licenses by the Director General of Water Services (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). Water companies started to be regulated by the regulator of the water sector, who is an individual (Director General of the OFWAT) appointed by the government for a fixed term of 5 years. The regulator was granted various powers, in particular the one of setting the water prices in such a way as to allow the water firms to cover reasonable costs, including a fair rate of return on their investments. Water prices were set according to the price cap rule (Littlechild, 1986), which places the price increase limit based on the retail price index and on a return rate for capital invested for a period of 10 years (but it can be subject to periodical revisions every 5 years).

After the implementation of the 1989 Water Act, the water sector in the UK went through a process of consolidation. In England & Wales the water services came to be provided by only the 10 water companies formed from the original RWAs (so-called Water and Sewage Companies or WASCs) and by 12 private business companies (so-called Water Only Companies or WOCs) (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). The performance of the water sector in England & Wales is relatively good in several dimensions. Operating costs have declined in real terms by 18% in water supply and 9% in sewage in the period between 1992 and 2002, and employment costs have fallen 17% in the period between 1993 and 2002 (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). There is some evidence that productivity and custo-

mer service has improved (Stone and Webster Consultants, 2004) and that leakage has been contained (OFWAT, 2008). Mostly, a large investment program of about £ 17 billion has been delivered within 6 years after the privatization (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). On the whole, after the 1989 reform the water sector achieved more efficiency, more investments, and better customer service.

3.2. Water service provision in France

Water services in France have long been dominated by private operators, to which many municipalities (about 37,000) usually award long term franchise contracts (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). The cornerstone of the regulation of water service provision in France is the contractual relationship between the municipalities and the private water operators. The delegation contract, which is defined as an administrative contract in the 1982 Decentralization Act, is based on the principles of continuity of service, equality of users and non-discrimination, and adaptation to new circumstances (Shugart, 1998). In particular, there are at least three kinds of delegation contracts. In the management contract, the operator manages a water system for relatively short time (e.g., 5 years) without any obligations in terms of capital investments or renewal. In the *affermage* contract the private operator is responsible for managing the water system and for asset maintenance, renewals, and rehabilitation, although ownership of the assets is kept by the municipality. Last, in the concession contract, the private operator is responsible for both managing the water system and financing new investments, although the assets are nominally owned by the municipalities. In the last two long-term contracts, the private operator is entrusted control of the water assets and decision on prices.

On the whole, the structure of the water sector in France includes several service areas but relatively few operators. The water sector includes about 13,500 water supply service areas and 15,000 sewage service areas (several small municipalities have pooled together their water services in so-called *syndicates de communes* or other kinds of consortia). Most of these water service areas are managed by private operators, which supply water to about 79% of the population and sewage to about 50% (Roche and Johannes, 2000). The main operators in the water sector in France are Veolia Water (formerly Vivendi), Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux, and Société d'Aménagement Urbain et Rural (SAUR), plus about 50 smaller companies, such as SCET, Ruas, and Sogédo (Rouse, 2007). So far, no foreign operator has ever been able to enter the French water franchise market, while French water companies have undertaken operation of water services abroad.

The performance of the water sector in France is difficult to assess because of little publicly available information (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). There are no data available on the cost of regulation, for example, although it may be likely higher than in England & Wales. There is also little evidence available on service quality, although there seems to be a relatively high degree of non-compliance with drinking quality standards (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). There is some evidence, instead, concerning water prices, which vary according to the size of the

municipality (smaller municipalities have cheaper prices), the kind of operator (private operators are more expensive), and accessibility and quality of water (IFEN, 2001). Efficiency in the water sector should be stimulated, in principle, by the mechanism of tender offer competition for selecting the private water operator for the franchise contract. The effectiveness of tender offer competitions, however, is negatively affected by potentially anti-competitive behaviour, information asymmetries, and slow turnover due to the long term duration of the franchise contracts. More than 85% of the water franchise contracts are renewed with the same operator (*Cour des Comptes*, 2003). As an alternative to contracting out the water services, however, municipalities can also revert to public management, and such a threat can stimulate private operators to improve efficiency. For example, the municipality of Paris announced to return to public management of water services after the contracts with Veolia and Suez expired on 31st December 2009.

3.3. Water service provision in Germany

Water service provision in Germany is characterized by the involvement of municipalities in the direct management of water services. Differently from the institutional arrangement provided in other countries, in Germany there is no clear-cut separation of regulatory and operational functions of water services (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). Quite often the municipalities directly undertake water supply, sometimes they manage it through joint ownership of water firms with private operators, and only occasionally they delegate it to private operators. Municipalities, moreover, are fully involved in the sewage and wastewater treatment services, which are defined by the law as a sovereign core responsibility of the public sector, and may delegate to private operators some selected operational activities only.

The legal framework for regulating water services, including provisions which specify the delegation contracts and water tariff setting, is provided by the 16 German States (*Länder*) (Ballance and Taylor, 2005). The water tariffs are set through different procedures in each State, but usually the decision is made by the State Ministry of Economy after the water firms submit a tariff increase proposal (generally based on cost recovery principles) and an independent audit opinion. In some city-states (e.g., Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen), however, the Minister of Economy (called Senator) both proposes the tariff increase as member of the board of the water firm and also approves it, in an apparent conflict of interest because of the double role played. Such overlap of roles is not exceptional in the corporatist institutional environment which characterizes the water policy subsystem in Germany. The German model «essentially works without formal, external regulatory supervision for the key items of water prices, sewerage charges and tariffs, investment and return on capital (profit). The functions of regulation are fulfilled by other means» (Kraemer, 1998).

The structure of the water sector in Germany is quite fragmented. It includes more than 6,500 firms, which service about 16,000 municipalities (BDEW, 2008).

Private operators are more frequent in the eastern regions, where the States, which used to provide the water services before the reunification of the country, have been increasingly affected by budget constraints. In general, anyway, in the water sector in Germany there are not many private operators, which are subject to less favorable tax and financial conditions than public ones (e.g., water services provided as a commercial activity are charged VAT, and generally grants for investments in water assets are awarded to public operators only). Most of the water firms are diversified into other utilities too, such as electricity, gas, district heating, public transport, and sometimes telephone and cable television. These multi-utility companies (Stadtwerke) operate in 93% of the municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, including Munich, Stuttgart, Dusseldorf, Essen, Hannover, Bremen, and Dresden.

The performance of the water sector in Germany is difficult to assess, as well as the French one, because of little publicly available information. In general, the water firms in Germany seem to achieve good technical efficiency in terms of leakage, which is estimated 7% on average (BDEW, 2008). This figure is much lower than the level of leakage recorded in English & Welsh firms (29%), French ones (25%), and Italian ones (27%) (Gebhardt, 2008). The water tariffs charged by German firms are relatively higher than those charged in other EU countries (Wackerbauer, 2009), in particular England & Wales (about 50% higher) and France (about 60% higher). Most of the users, however, declare themselves satisfied or very satisfied with drinkable water supply (about 92%), and are connected to municipal wastewater treatment plants with the highest EU standard (about 90%) (Wackerbauer, 2009).

3.4. Water service provision in Italy

Current regulation of water service provision in Italy originated from Act 36/1994, which provided the re-regulation of drinkable water supply, sewage, and wastewater services. The 1994 water reform, which aimed to reconfigure the whole organization and management of water services in the country, built on four main principles (Citroni *et al.*, 2007; Goria and Lugaresi, 2002; Muraro, 2003). First, water services would be comprehensively organized and managed in relatively large territories (so-called *Ambiti Territoriali Ottimali*, that is, Optimal Territorial Areas or OTA) in order to allow water firms to achieve economies of scale. Second, all the segments of the water services would be managed 'under one roof' in order to better coordinate the stages of the water management cycle. Third, planning and control functions would be separated from those of operational management and service delivery in order to elicit the entrepreneurial management of the water firms. Last, water tariffs would be set to cover the full cost of water services (i.e., including investment depreciation and return to capital invested) in order to allow the water firms to achieve financial self-sufficiency.

The current structure of the water industry in Italy looks quite different than it used to be a couple of decades ago. Water services have been reorganized in 67 OTAs according to the terms provided by the 1994 water reform. In these OTAs,

water concessions have been awarded to 102 firms total, most of which (58) qualified as «in house» water firms. Most of these water firms resulted from extensive consolidation processes, which led to the emergence of relatively middle-large sized organizations, including ACEA based in Rome (serving about 7 million users), AQP in Puglia (4.5 million), Hera in Bologna (2 million), Smat in Turin (2 million), Iride in Genoa (1.9 million), and Abbanoa in Sardinia (1.6 million). In the other 27 OTAs, instead, water services are still managed by hundreds (possibly thousands) of operators, mostly still consisting of local government departments directly involved in managing the water services or local government-owned companies.

The performance of the water sector in Italy is historically characterized by unreliable service, high leakage, and insufficient sewage and wastewater treatment, at least in some areas of the country. The water reform intended to trigger investments into the sector, but a survey of 53 OTAs (COVIRI, 2007) showed that, in the first 3 years of the new regulatory regime, the water firms carried out € 2.12 billion water works only. This figure is lower than originally planned (€ 4.38 billion) and than the amount required to comply with the current EU pollution and quality standards (about € 3 billion per year for the next 10 years; ASTRID, 2008). Recent reports (COVIRI, 2008; ASTRID, 2008; Bluebook, 2008) also highlighted that the water firms are characterized, on the whole, by relatively modest return on equity, high leverage, and difficulties to access corporate finance sources. Water tariffs are relatively low, at least in comparison to other EU countries (the aforementioned reports showed that average water tariffs in Italy range 0.56–0.75 €/m³, in Spain 0.78–0.90 €/m³, in France 1.93–2.72 €/m³, in Germany 2.87–4.30 €/m³, and in the UK 2.08–4.39 €/m³), mostly because of local governments' concern with containing water bills and preventing anger from their constituencies. On the whole, all these weaknesses of the regulatory system seem to keep private financing of infrastructure development in the sector at bay (Anwandter and Rubino, 2006a; 2006b).

4. A comparative analysis of the regulation of water service provision

This section will contrast and compare the internal and external institutions for regulating water service provision in Germany, France, the UK, and Italy. The comparison between the institutional arrangements («internal institutions») is shown in Table 1, which brings together the vertical and horizontal forms of integration and the ownership structure of water firms. The rows of Table 1 refer to different degrees of participation of public and/or private capital in the ownership of water firms. The columns of Table 1 relate to different degrees of vertical and horizontal integration of the water firms (i.e., whether water firms provide all the water supply, sewage, and wastewater treatment services over relatively large service areas or not). The institutional arrangement of the water sector in England & Wales stands at the top-left corner of the table, because of the full private ownership of water firms and their high degree of vertical and horizontal integration. The opposite corner of the table is occupied by Germany, whose institu-

tional arrangement of the water sector is characterized by dominant presence of public capital and some vertical and horizontal fragmentation. France is closer to England & Wales because of the dominant presence of private capital and the integration of the water sector (especially horizontal one). Italy, instead, is positioned closer to Germany, because of the mixed presence of public and private capital (although local government ownership of water firms is still prevalent) and the modest horizontal integration of the water sector (although fragmentation of the sector has significantly reduced after the implementation of the 1994 water

	Vertically and horizontally integrated water firms	Fairly vertically and horizontally integrated water firms	Fairly vertically and modestly horizontally integrated water firms	Modestly vertically and horizontally integrated water firms
Private capital (fully or mostly)	England & Wales	France		
Mixed public-private capital			Italy	
Public capital (fully or mostly)				Germany

Table 1: Ownership structure and degrees of vertical and horizontal integration of the water sector

reform).

The comparison between the institutional environments («external institutions») of the four countries is shown in Table 2. The rows in Table 2 refer to the different kinds of constitutional structure of the State (i.e., unitary, regional, and federal), which affects the allocation of regulatory functions. The columns in Table 2, instead, relate to different degrees of stability of the governments, which affects the extent to which property rights can be authoritatively reconfigured. The institutional environment of the UK is situated at the top-left corner of the table, because of the presence of relatively stable single-party governments in a relatively strong unitary State. At the opposite corner of the table, Germany and Italy are characterized by decentralized, multi-layered governance structures and coalition governments. France is closer to the UK in terms of unity of the State, although French governments typically rely on party coalition support.

	Alternative government of a single political party	Alternative governments of stable coalitions	Alternative governments of unstable coalitions
Unitary States	United Kingdom	France	
Regional States			Italy
Federalist States		Germany	

Table 2: Constitutional structure and political frameworks

Jointly taken into account, tables 1 and 2 show that there is significant diversity between the UK, France, Germany and Italy, both in the internal institutions of the water sector and in the environmental ones. In general, no country can be taken as exemplar of the institutional environments and arrangements of the water sector. The UK stands as a «polar» case of a country characterized by unitary constitutional structure of the State and relatively stable government, and of high presence of private capital and relatively strong vertical and horizontal integration of the water sector. At the opposite, Germany and Italy present dominant public ownership, weakly integrated water firms (at least in the horizontal dimension), and party coalition governments in not unitary States.

Tables 1 and 2 suggest that not all institutional arrangements may be compatible with any institutional environment. The institutional arrangement of the water sector in England & Wales, namely a system of full private ownership of vertically and horizontally integrated water firms, seems hardly conceivable in an institutional environment like the German one, characterized by a federalist State and party coalition governments, or the Italian one, portrayed as a regional State with relatively unstable party coalition governments. The case of France suggests, however, that also in unitary States the institutional arrangement of the water sector may be characterized by less than full vertical and horizontal integration. It seems possible, that also in countries endowed with an institutional environment like the UK the water sector could be more fragmented and open to both private and public ownership.

An issue arises, then, regarding whether countries characterized by an institutional environment like Germany or Italy may develop institutional arrangements of the water sector like in England & Wales, namely full private ownership and vertical and horizontal integration of water firms. The allocation of regulatory functions between public authorities located at different government layers and the absence of a stable single party government suggest that an 'England & Wales-like' set of internal institutions of the water sector is unlikely to turn out in Germany and Italy. The 1994 water reform that was implemented in Italy, for example, significantly increased the integration of the water firms and partially

opened up the water sector to private capital, but it missed achieving the level of integration and private capital participation found in the water sector in England & Wales. The differences between the institutional environments of the two countries may account for the lack of convergence between the Italian and the English & Welsh water regulation. In the UK, the privatization of water firms followed the establishment, in 1973, of the RWAs in England & Wales in order to centralize water regulation previously scattered between the Joint Water Boards and the River Authorities. In Italy, instead, the central government lacked the constitutional power and the stability to command the reallocation of regulatory functions between public authorities and the reconfiguration of property rights of water firms owned by sub-national governments.

5. Conclusions

This study discussed the reasons for the variety of regulatory systems of water service provision across four EU countries as an instance of a broader issue, namely why local governments organize, manage, and regulate the provision of local public services in different ways. The analysis showed that the differences between the regulatory institutions for water service provision may be related to fundamental differences between the institutional environments of the four countries. If this argument holds, there seems to be little scope for convergence between different modes of regulating water service provision, because of deep-seated differences in the constitutional structure of the State and the degrees of stability of the government across countries.

A concluding argument from this study is that the quest for improving the performance of local public services may be one which pursues the betterment of existing modes of organizing, managing, and regulating water service provision, rather than redesigning institutional arrangements which do not 'fit' with country-specific institutional environments. This view calls for efforts to improve existing systems for the delivery of local public services first, rather than to replace them with novel ones which still have to pass the test of institutional viability. Possible areas for improvement may include, for example, better planning for infrastructure development, customer care, service standards setting, performance measurement and benchmarking, and monitoring and control (and relatedly, sanctioning for non compliance and poor service delivery). The strengthening of local governments' administrative systems for performing these functions seems of utmost importance for contributing improving the performance of local public service delivery, given the kind of institutional arrangements provided for regulating local public services in any country.

Zusammenfassung

Lokale Verwaltungen unterscheiden sich von Land zu Land und von Sektor zu Sektor beträchtlich in der Art und Weise wie sie organisiert sind, wie sie geleitet werden und wie sie lokale öffentliche Dienste reglementieren. Zu den Behördensystemen lokaler öffentlicher Dienste gehören so unterschiedliche Formen wie direkter Staatsbesitz- und -kontrolle, Franchising, willkürliche Verordnungen und Liberalisierung vorbehaltlich 'minimaler' Zugangs- und Qualitäts-Reglementierungen. Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Frage nach der enormen Vielfalt von Behördensystemen lokaler öffentlicher Dienste, indem die Perspektive der Neuen Institutionenökonomik (NIÖ) eingenommen wird. Die Analyse konzentriert sich empirisch auf die Behördensysteme im Bereich der Wasserversorgung in vier EU-Hauptländern: Deutschland, Frankreich, Grossbritannien und Italien. Aus der Analyse geht hervor, dass die Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen den institutionellen Umgebungen einen Einfluss auf die beobachtete Vielfalt der behördlichen Institutionen haben dürften. Zudem werden Schlussfolgerungen bezüglich des begrenzten Spielraums für Konvergenzen zwischen den Behördensystemen lokaler öffentlicher Dienste verschiedener Länder gezogen.

Résumé

Les formes d'organisation et de management des services locaux fournis à la population variant considérablement entre les pays et les secteurs d'activité. Les systèmes de régulation des services publics locaux comprennent diverses formes telles que des entreprises en propriété de l'Etat, des franchises, des organes de régulation, ou encore des services libéralisés soumis à un contrôle minimal de qualité. Cet article analyse les raisons qui expliquent ces différentes formes, en recourant au cadre théorique du nouveau institutionnalisme économique. L'analyse est centrée sur les systèmes de régulation du secteur de l'eau, au sein que quatre pays européens (Allemagne, France, UK et Italie). L'analyse montre que les similarités et différences entre les environnements institutionnels expliquent une partie de la variété des formes observées. Sur cette base, des conclusions liées à la convergence limitée des solutions mises en œuvre sont développées.

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Tables

Table 1: Ownership structure and degrees of vertical and horizontal integration of the water sector

Table 2: Constitutional structure and political frameworks