

EURAM
2010



10th

19th-22nd May, Rome

Back to the Future

Tor Vergata University, Rome, ITALY

TRACK 8: Governance in public and non-profit organizations: systems, mechanisms and roles

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Abstract:

Public service delivery has changed radically over the last decades. Two interrelated dynamics have emerged (Cornforth, 2003): (a) the creation of a wide range of devolved or quasi-autonomous agencies to deliver public services; and (b) the increasing adoption of market-type mechanisms through the separation of the “purchaser” (that keeps being the guarantor of the satisfaction of public needs) from the “provider” role (responsible for delivering the services). As a result of this second dynamic, non profit or hybrid organizations have gained a prominent role as providers of public services, besides the more traditional role of social capital building. Consequently, several concerns about the governance of this kind of organizations have emerged.

The focus of the track is mainly on the “micro” or “organizational” level, with particular reference to governance systems, governance mechanisms and governance roles. Thus, the term governance is primarily conceptualized as “organizational governance”, i.e. the systems by which a public or non profit organization is directed, controlled and made accountable. According to this meaning, governance deals with the rights and responsibilities of an

organization's board, its management, shareholders, and stakeholders (Charkham, 1994; Charkham, and Simpson, 1999; Bonn, and Fisher, 2005). A particular object of interest is the organization's board or governing body, which carries formal responsibility for the public or non profit organization. Very relevant issues are: board behavior and effectiveness, the relationships between board, management and other internal and external stakeholders (Farrell, 2005).

The track aims: (1) at contributing to the definition of the theoretical components that assign a innovation role to governance systems in public and non profit organizations; (2) at showing the opportunity for a deeper analysis of governance mechanisms in their relationships with both the external (stakeholders) actors and the internal (management) actors; (3) at addressing the conditions which enable governance mechanisms to effectively cover their own roles.

Keywords: governance, public organizations, non profit organizations, boards.