

Book Review

Global Warning! Debating International Developments in New Public Financial Management
CAPPELEN AKADEMISK FORLAG publishers, Norway
(for details see <http://www.gsm.mq.edu.au/pstc/globalwarning>)

By Olov Olson, James Guthrie, and Christopher Humphrey

The continuing application of New Public Management, "commercialization" and privatization of some public sector functions in Australia and internationally may deny access to services for the economically disadvantaged, according to a new book discussing the impact of developments in new public financial management.

The book is the outcome of a unique two year collaborative project involving 24 senior accounting academics from eleven different countries, including Australia, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America.

John Meyer, Professor of Sociology at Stanford University observes in his foreword to the book that it will be of great interest and value to a wide ranging audience - not only to those concerned with accounting and financial management, but also to organizational researchers, political scientists and sociologists.

"This book is about the rise and international impact of a social movement trying to reform public management around the world along rational and rationalistic lines. The roots of the movement are in professional accounting, especially in the private sector. The effort is to bring models of New Public Financial Management, with many associated accounting improvements, into place in state and local public organizations. The movement has gained considerable force in the last two decades, and has had widespread effects on the ways public organizations are perceived, on policies governing them, and sometimes on organizational practices.

Olov Olson, James Guthrie, and Christopher Humphrey, with colleagues from eleven countries, have put together an extraordinary review of the rise of New Public Management programs in these countries; on their march to more or less successful adoption and implementation, and on their impact on policy and practice. The project has been comparative in character, and the analyses look at events in particular countries in light of, and often in contrast to, events elsewhere.

According to James Guthrie, Professor in Management at Macquarie Graduate School of Management and one of the book's editors, "Global Warning!" is the result of a comprehensive two-year research project encompassing eleven different countries.

"This book provides a much needed challenge to the rise and claimed international success of new public financial management systems. Previous research in the field has tended to focus on the accounting principles of reform but we have chosen to address organizational, social and managerial aspects as well".

"Throughout the book we have tried to highlight the impact on society of public financial management reform and the movement towards greater efficiency and a bottom-line orientation within the public sector."

"The book puts NPFM on trial in a way which it has never been in the past. It replaces caricatured, broad brush depictions of different national developments with a much needed detailed, comparative analysis of experiences with NPFM. It questions what so often has gone unquestioned; exploring the wide range of financial management techniques which lie at the heart of so many new public management initiatives, yet which have been repeatedly glossed over by leading public administration writers. It challenges prior theories and assumptions concerning the global spread and claimed irresistibility of NPFM. It shows how public financial management is a live debating subject, bursting with critical policy implications for the provision of public services"

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