Devolution has definitely become a ‘flagship’ in the Italian political debate. It has affected any aspect of public policy over the last 17 years and the cultural sector has not been spared. Its key aim is to decentralise legal and administration powers in a way that could reduce the burden of State offices work and set up a more efficient and effective administration able to meet citizens’ needs. After a long tradition of centralized policies and administration, long, costly and often inefficient procedures required a profound change. The reforms were so led by the ideal to implement public policies closest to citizens’ needs, to provide direct responses and increase their participation to local governments’ actions (democratization and participative policy), to deliver more effective services (better performance) and distribute more equally the burden of administrative work of State offices (decentralisation of day-to-day administration).

In order to see if these aims have been fulfilled, we will go through two real case studies, so adopting a micro viewpoint of analysis. The SBCR (Lazio, IT) and GA/ER (Emilia-Romagna, IT) are two administrative “networks” set up between local municipalities to coordinate libraries’ services and initiatives in support of young artists. The choice of the micro viewpoint is supported by the fact that devolution has its direct effects on regional and local governments’ actions. Within the general debate about devolution, the tension between central/ peripheral powers and resources is often one of the main concerns. However, in our analysis this is not the case. Our objective is to specifically see what devolution implies not in terms of transferred powers and resources, but in terms of resources’ management. We want to understand if and how regions and municipalities assign and manage resources to cultural initiatives. This should give us some clues to get the effects of devolution in terms of better performance when looking at the day-to-day practical application of macro policy reforms.

At this level, the analysis becomes interesting as well as challenging: how to distinguish common trends from local specificities? Actually, the two case studies’ present common problems even if they are related to two different cultural sectors: librarian heritage (protection and promotion) and contemporary arts (promotion). This evidence, analysed through the lenses of the literature on cultural policy reforms and managerial rhetoric, confirms that the selected examples are not isolated cases. Instead, a common “curse” in Italian cultural policies emerges.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:
HOW TO FILL THE ACTUAL GAP BETWEEN MACRO POLICY AND MICRO MANAGEMENT?
The specific objective of the analysis is to study the actual effects of devolution looking at two real cases. The common problems have been analysed within the theoretical framework of cultural management studies. What emerges is a constant gap between “cultural policies” and “the way policies are implemented” (management). The GA/ER and SBCR are two example of what we will call “geographical devolution” as powers pass from national to regional and local levels, but cultural activities still depend on each local administration strategies (Phase I). In order to solve this kind of problems, local administrators are used to “outsource” public services through a certain form of the so called “privatization” (Phase II). But privatization as such is not necessarily better than “public”. It is somehow accepted that “privatization” equals better management, but this assumption does not consider the different implications and meaning of “privatizing”. The term can refer to the introduction of private management principles (the aims-resources-objectives chain) or simply to the acquisition of private funds or the application of private law to employ new human resources in a more flexible and quicker way. New organizations with a certain degree of autonomy from the public sector are often created as to act in a more flexible way (ex. for financial and resource management). This should also allow the public sector to involve professionals with specific competences both from the private and public cultural sector. However, this is only partially true since decisional processes often undergo very limited change. Basically, the members of the decisional board of these organizations are often the culture councillors of the same municipalities that created the organizations. In other words, they maintain all decisional powers on crucial matters like financial resources for cultural projects. Professionals are usually part of bodies which just have consulting functions, but no decisional powers. New organisations are formally autonomy from public administrations but they are not really innovative as far as decisional process is concerned. Our purpose is thus to address the attention to powers’ devolution with respect to its real effectiveness given the purpose of devolution policies. The core question is: does devolution positively affect cultural aims? If so, why and how? We will try to answer these questions through our analysis. We also want to show that the problems discussed actually hinge on a common “way of doing”, frequently observed within the Italian cultural sector (and the public sector in general). This happens despite of the specific field of activities as in our cases, one related to librarian heritage and the other to contemporary artistic production.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PAPER STRUCTURE
The answers to the questions posed in this study are based on empirical research and literature overview. We have consulted the relevant literature on cultural policy devolution and managerial rhetoric in order to place the study in context and provide a theoretical framework supporting the outcomes of our empirical investigation. The article is structured as follows. First, the Italian devolution policy is quickly reviewed in order to place the study in context and the object of analysis is presented within this framework. Second, by analyzing the two case studies, it investigates the effects of cultural policy devolution (macro level) using a managerial perspective (micro level). Third, it offers an insight into the rhetoric surrounding cultural policy devolution suggesting a distinction between geographical and organizational devolution. In conclusions, the article proposes further research on the discussed issues in order to bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice.
DEVOLUTION IN ITALIAN CULTURAL POLICY: THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Devolution reforms start in the 90’s: constitutional changes and the so-called ‘Bassanini laws’ grant Italian regions and local administrations with increased legislative and administrative powers in different fields including culture. The general principle inspiring the reform is to devolve competences in areas of major cultural relevance to regions. Regions are in fact supposed to better interpret and respond to regional needs. As for legislative powers (devolution), regions can now enact laws on promozione e valorizzazione (promotion) of cultural goods and activities according to the State guidelines (the so called leggi quadro), while the State retains all powers concerning the tutela (protection) of Cultural Heritage. Accordingly, local administrations are granted all administration powers under the principles of subsidiarity, differentiation and adequateness (decentralisation). Higher administration levels must intervene only when the lowest level is not able to fulfill citizens’ needs. The law 142/90 completes the legislative framework further re-organizing local bodies, giving municipalities and provinces more autonomy and providing them with juridical tools to enhance cooperation in local services’ management. The law 142/90 is thus at the heart of the change that local administrations’ day-to-day work underwent. The juridical tools introduced – convenzioni (kind of agreement), consortia and municipal unions- give local administrations the possibility to entirely manage local services and, if the case, start collaborations with other public and private stakeholders. Consociation allowed all kinds of legal subjects to share responsibilities concerning cultural facilities (like libraries) and youth (initiatives to support young artists). This law is particularly relevant in the analysis of the GA/ER and SBCR case studies as they used the Convenzione to coordinate cultural services with regional relevance: library services, in the first case; art exhibitions/competitions/festivals, in the second. Under this agreement, municipalities started to collaborate with the aim to create a library system in the Castelli Romani area in Lazio and to provide a regional support to the “young creatives” between the age of 18 and 35 residing in Emilia-Romagna.

OBJECT OF ANALYSIS: THE GA/ER AND SBCR CASE STUDIES

The GA/ER and SBCR were launched at the end of 90’s, during the first decade of devolution reforms. The GA/ER was created as a municipalities’ network to provide a sound support to the “young creatives” between the age of 18 and 35 residing in Emilia-Romagna (IT). It tries to take over the weak support that contemporary artistic production suffers in Italy. The circuit members organize art exhibitions, competitions and they spread information about the local initiatives across a consistent number of young artists. Set up through a Convenzione between the Region and the representative municipality of the GA/ER (Forli), the “circuit” has been organized as a decentralized network. The representative performs the administrative and accounting tasks, whilst the municipalities affiliated organize the local initiatives. Local administrations can also activate specific collaborations with museums, theatrical companies and, in general, organizations which can support the “network” as an institutional supporter and financial partner. The circuit has no financial autonomy. The GA/ER members and the Region assign part of their financial resources on an annual basis according to the costs of local initiatives and the resources available. From 1999 to 2006, the regional and municipalities’ subsidies covered an annual spending of about 50,000,00 Euros per year. A similar situation can be observed for human resources. GA/ER projects are managed by the civil servants of the local young artists’ bureaus. The idea of a library system was born in 1985 as the summa of cooperative experiences amongst local Castelli Romani libraries, upon realizing that it was the proper time to develop a network of their own cultural territorial services. In 1991 a Convenzione was signed between the local institutions and the libraries, the first agreement in the Lazio region to identify this system with a regional law (law 142/90). This model experimented between 1985-1996 showed its inadequacies, consisting of a weak consulting group which was not always the expression of both politicians and librarians, but, often, it was the instrument of dialogue between the employees of the system. The GA/ER was born considering the problems of the “operational” problems deriving from the specificities of the Convenzione into a Consortium. In 1997 the Consortium was officially recognized at the national level, bringing together 11 municipalities (today 17); it gradually became the reference institution of the whole area, developing culture in a strategic way.

The GA/ER case study goes through the “privatization” of this network intended as a way to introduce private management principles. The starting point of the research is the huge increment of public subsidy (+ 780%) followed by the transformation of the GA/ER into a non-for profit organization which can finally raise private funds, include private stakeholders and hire new people according to private law. The case study has two aims. First, it investigates the consequences of the budget increase in the light of new organizational and managerial needs. Second, it analyses the subsequent transformation of the GA/ER into a legal persona (2009) and its potential effects in responding to organizational and managerial needs. Third, it suggests further research using a managerial perspective in order to reduce the gap between local and national (public policy view) and micro conditions for the action (management view).

At the same time, the second case study offers insight into the “managerialization” of the Consortium SBCR, instituted in 1997 following the disposals of the national law 142/90 on local governments’ powers. In particular, at that time it was seen as the proper juridical model which could manage the 17 municipalities associated in the Castelli Romani area (Lazio, IT), to realize the ambitious project of a unique big library. Each municipality associated adheres to a responsibility proportional to the amount given as participation fee. As regard to the internal organization chart, it is very basic, formed by four main bodies: the majors’ assembly, the board of directors, the president and the director. Director’s role is a particularly delicate one, having to coordinate the different services and each library of the system and submitting it into the budget (to be approved by the Board); furthermore, he has also to value all the suggestions coming from the 17 municipalities associated, in particular the problems and needs expressed by majors during the Assembly, the political issues coming from each one of them, often in clash with the cultural objectives established by the staff (constant trade off between financial needs/goals). The Assembly is a particularly important body, because it expresses the adhesion of the 17 municipalities associated, which debate the relevant issues around the same table. It expresses the real and political- administrative control body, made up of the representatives of each associated municipality therefore the major. In this way the political domain is assured over the time, forcing also slighter trade off between the political and cultural aims (rigidity of the functioning system).

Throughout the years the Consortium SBCR has increased its services both in quantity and in quality, acting as a facilitator of local development in the Castelli Romani cultural district. The case study wants to focus in particular on the rigid status of this public body, which is profoundly limited by the impossibility of acting in a direct way on the greater part of the resources, facing, as in the recent past, the relevant problems of understaffing and organizational reconstruction. Second, the analysis wants also to suggest the introduction of an Operative Managing Foundation, which could add more flexibility and autonomy of resources. Third, it poses the crucial question related to the regional relevance while respecting local specificities. The Reggio Emilia province is a fitting example of the political expression of the 17 municipalities associated over the time, where politicians can trade resources/goals during the Assembly. In this way the Consortium SBCR will be assisted by a private professional who will be part of the Board of Directors of the Foundation. The linking managerial logic will so be provided from inside the organization as with a proactive member acting from the internal governance structure.

In the two cases, the region and local municipalities, therefore public bodies, are respectively the funders and direct administrators of the projects following the 90’s devolution reforms. The Convenzione so gathered local municipalities, provinces and the region who committed to give a financial and institutional support to public services considered of regional relevance, the first agreements in the Lazio region shown in the Lazio region. In Lazio, the Convenzione granted a “recognized identity” to the fragmented territory of the Castelli Romani area that always suffered their proximity to Rome. In Emilia Romagna, instead, the GA/ER circuit attempts to take over the weak support that contemporary artistic production suffers in Italy. However, our research significantly shows that devolution municipalities are not yet ready to deal with “environmental” problems deriving from the specificities of the public sector. The GA/ER and SBCR are not even outposts of local administrations as they are managed locally and a regional governing body - autonomous from public administrations - does not exist. Under the Convenzione, the GA/ER and SBCR aims still hinge on the “binding rules [that] make extremely difficult and rigid (and costly) the life of whatever body within the public sector [...].” (Zan, 2003).
Lack of autonomy and responsibility logic. The lack of autonomy due to the convenzione regime means that the SBCR and GA/ER decisions on basic issues like financial and human resources are taken by each affiliated municipality’s Committee. No common governance bodies exist, employment of human resources depends on each municipality’s assignment criteria. Complications deriving from the “autonomy deficit” of the convenzione regime firstly emerged as understaffing problems raised. In the SBCR case, to hire new people the regional parliament enacted a specific norm, the regional law 29/96. Although it can sound odd that a managerial need is solved through laws, this is in line with Italy’s high level of “juridification” (Meneguzzo 1995; Ladu 1997). The Constituent Convention (1946) led the reform process of Italy’s cultural sector over the past 15 years through a staggering number of norms, laws and regulations concerning its institutional and organisational situations (Zan, Bonini Baraldi and Gordon, 2007). As for the GA/ER, no particular staff needs emerged before 2007, when the circuit was granted a huge public subsidy. In 2007-08, almost all Ital-
tionship with the public sector. Due to the impossibility to manage the resources with a certain degree of flexibility and autonomy from the public sector, GA/ER’s members and the region itself pushed forward the idea to create a new organisation, autonomous from the public sector. The requested transformation was informally called “privatization”: the goal was to create a new organization (juridically) able to reactivate private funds, including private foundations and hire new people according to private law. In general, the issue was most addressed from a juridical than a managerial viewpoint, sometimes adopting the concept of “privatization” as a panacea. This kind of thoughts were considered as the only way to meet the new and more ambitious GA/ER’s aims which follow the budget increase. The purpose is now to enhance GA/ER’s role, as a public and professional bodies acting according to the decision making process of the regional administration and to enhance private organizations and recently extended to the cultural ones. The SBCR Consortium - as in the SBCR Consortium - with the possibility to create work teams by areas of interest. In both cases, the Assembly and the Project Managers.A star program, thanks to its status of legal persona, would have also given the possibility to: a) employ human resources with a private law contract. Differently from the circuit of public administrations’ structures, the association reorganized its work teams by areas of interest. In the end, it will also benefit the GA/ER instead of generating a more complicated governance structure. In particular, the Association, thanks to its status of legal persona, would have also given the possibility to: a) employ human resources with a private law contract. Differently from the circuit of public administrations’ structures, the association reorganized its work teams by areas of interest. In the end, it will also benefit the GA/ER instead of generating a more complicated governance structure. In particular, the Association, thanks to its status of legal persona, would have also given the possibility to: a) employ human resources with a private law contract. Differently from the circuit of public administrations’ structures, the association reorganized its work teams by areas of interest. In the end, it will also benefit the GA/ER instead of generating a more complicated governance structure. In particular, the Association, thanks to its status of legal persona, would have also given the possibility to: a) employ human resources with a private law contract. Differently from the circuit of public administrations’ structures, the association reorganized its work teams by areas of interest. In the end, it will also benefit
making, in fact, still hinges on the political component of the GA/ER, now composed by a more than doubled number of public bodies representatives (7 plus the 11 who joined the circuit in 2009). What’s peculiar is that, although participation of private stakeholders was one of the reasons of the change, private members have a role of financial partners within the GA/ER Association. The decisional body (Assembly) is composed by the local culture councillors of the municipalities affiliated.

Private stakeholders with a mere financial role. The Statute makes precise that only “founders and ordinary members” can be part of the Assembly, which is the decision body. These are notably public bodies (founders) and members from the third sector (ordinary members). Private professionals can only take part to the Association as financial partners but they have no decisional power on GA/ER’s activities, budget and outcomes.

“What is left inside this “model” to satisfy managerial logic? Certainly some degrees of freedom exist: but the chain from within, and a delegate of the private society has become proactive member of the Board of Directors, named by the Consortium itself. Before that, the private consultancy experienced several difficulties trying to propose new ways of thinking and acting within the bodies usually working according to public sector principles. That’s why its “professional” nature for the Board of Directors as the sole effective way to influence operations from within. In particular, this kind of professionalism has been fundamental during the crucial consulting phase with the 17 majors/assessors (September-December 2008). The intent was to propose and debate with the politicians the hypothetical model of local development and the juridical means through which it implement it.

WHAT DEVOLUTION MEANT IN THE TWO CASES

In the two analyzed cases, “devolution” finally combines with “decentralization” and “privatization” forms. To understand the differences between devolution and decentralisation and their relationship with privatisation, one might begin by expanding Donahue’s typology, as suggested by Schuster. Devolution could in fact be analysed according to the dimensions of financing and performance (delivery of goods and services) but also of policy-making and administration (management) (Schuster, 1997). In both case studies, the pervasive nature of the public sector underlined the inadequacy of the juridical tools used within a devolution process, when not accompanied by appropriate managerial changes. The following SWOT analysis tries to sum the consequences of devolution in Italian cultural policies starting from “assumption” of devolution as a strength. This in fact depends on how it combines with other “dimensions” of policy making, like financing, administration and performance (what changes with the Association is mainly financing, but not administration - by local municipalities - and performance - by local municipalities but it should involve more steps for the future).

Strengths. Devolution in cultural policies certainly introduced a direct “dialogue” between citizens and local administrations managing local services. This is more evident in the Consortium SBCR because of the role that a library can have for a number of citizens most likely higher than that of young artists. Even if we are far from the full impact of devolution in terms of wider participation of citizens, it is sure that a great institutional commitment is required to support this kind of projects in the long term. In spite of the underlined problems, almost 20 years after their creation, we can say that such a kind support has necessarily existed.

Weaknesses. However, the lack of autonomy from public administration suggests the limitedness of the change. As we explained above, the “public nature” of the Convenzione puts several constraints to the effectiveness of the projects given its aims. Moreover, lacking autonomy, the new projects could not be managed according to “responsibility” criteria. It’s someone else (political counterpart) that decide the priorities of resources the “professionals” need for the cultural project. If they have no say on that and if the assignment does not depend on results, how could devolution improve local governments’ performance? Of course, evaluation of results related to the cultural field is very challenging. However, several attempts are trying to combine qualitative and quantitative indicators in order to build a shared vision on outcomes’ evaluation.

Opportunities. On the other hand, thanks to devolution local municipalities could experiment new ways of managing local services, actually going much further devolution. The Consortium and the Association are a (partial) attempt to change internal management. The experiment, in fact, did not turn out positively, due to the highlighted problems. Experimentation can become a “threat” if it does correspond just to a formal partnership with no real consequences from an operational point of view. Privates could represent the strategic stakeholder to involve into the development process, starting to consider them not only as project partners, but also and above all as part of the internal system of governance, enhancing a mutual transfer of “capital of knowledge” in a long term prospective.

The wide political consensus around the promotion of the library’s heritage and the support to youth creativity clashes with some problematic issues. The Consortium SBCR had to face the political issues debated during each Majors’ Assembly and to make a trade off, balancing the suggestions coming from each one of the 17 municipalities associated, which often clash with the specific cultural goals set by the Directions. Having a modest approach, this becomes also a concrete weakness of the system, consisting in time wasting to...
understand the specific issues, write down and read the feasibility of each action: it emerges a relative rigidity of this public institution, the Consortium, characterized by the very prevalence of its “public nature”, which affects its flexibility and limited disposal of the resources, due to the impossibility to act in a direct way the greater part of the resources (personnel costs, increase or decrease in staff) of reform! Linked to this, the low effectiveness related to the libraries of the Consortium, characterized by the very prevalence of its “public persona”, to act in an autonomous way also in fundraising activities, limiting its ability to hire new people (see previous paragraph). However, in managerial terms, it cannot be ignored that a “professional” guide within the organization is still needed (see previous paragraph). However, in managerial terms, it cannot be ignored that a “professional” guide within the organization is still needed. Public employees may not always have the adequate competences to create a “regional cultural district” and help young artists to take part to national and international events (among the artists themselves). Public employees may not always have the adequate competences to create a “regional cultural district” and help young artists to take part to national and international events (among the artists themselves). Public employees may not always have the adequate competences to create a “regional cultural district” and help young artists to take part to national and international events (among the artists themselves). Public employees may not always have the adequate competences to create a “regional cultural district” and help young artists to take part to national and international events (among the artists themselves).

The case studies analyzed showed that devolution in Italy has not been a unique meaning or a single, given outcome. “In general, the term devolution should be used to refer to the movement of responsibility for a government programme to a lower level of government”. Its goal is to “lighten” the pressure on State offices, create more responsive policies for citizens’ needs and a more efficient and effective management of public services. Actually, devolution often resulted in a “geographical” move of competences within the Italian public sector showing its rigidity both at the national, regional and local level. In the devolution debate, one of the main concerns is the tension between central and periphery powers/resources. In our cases, relative budgets are not necessarily a reliable clue to “measure” devolution. The GA/ER set new and more ambitious aims only thanks to the national subsidy acquired from 2007. Within the Consortium SBCR, resources are available thanks to an established partnership between regional and local actors (provinces and municipalities). Interestingly, given the resources available, it’s management of resources to emerge in both cases as a constant concern. Devolution granted administration powers to local public bodies, but it had to face the specificities of the Italian context or, better said, the “rigid functioning mechanisms” that characterize Italian public administration.

If we look at devolution with regard to its multi-dimensional sphere, we note that devolution finally resulted in something that can be defined a kind of “privatization”. To understand the differences between devolution and decentralisation and their relationship to privatisation, one might begin by expanding Donahue’s typology. To his dimensions of financing and performance (delivery of goods and services) one might usefully add policy-making and administration (management)8. Privatization concerns the attempt to create external organizations and involving new actors from the private and third sector (with the Consortium and the Association, delivery of public services has been outsourced in a certain sense). Privatization can be here intended also as to raise private funds, to introduce the ‘objective-resources-actions-results’ logic mainly derived from the private sector, but especially to transferring new professional competences the local projects could benefit from and refer to private law to hire new people (financing and administration). Policy-making is mainly granted to the region, according to the laws we presented at the beginning. In a nutshell, devolution in its four dimensions (policy-making, administration, financing and performance8) has quite complex and often unattended outcomes, with initiatives like the GA/ER and the Consortium SBCR struggling between public sector constraints and attempts to go further devolution. What seems to be crucial is to receive more autonomy from the public sector providing autonomous functioning rules.

Until now, the attempts to exit from public sectors have remained modest. A great emphasis has been put on formal changes, but decision making process keeps more or less unchanged and room for private professionals’ action is pushing to further synergies, developed through the transfer of knowledge capital in a long term prospective trend to the possibility to enhance the adoption of appropriate managerial changes. More innovative results are attended as long as the Association develops and the Operational Foundation is created.

**Table 2 - SWOT analysis**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Direct control of the GA/ER and the CSBRC at regional and local level (devolution and decentralization)</td>
<td>• Professionals have no decisional powers on human and financial resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Renovated institutional commitment of regional and local authorities for their increasing role in public policies</td>
<td>• Local projects are still managed according to public administrations rules</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Region and municipalities have the powers and tools to experiment new collaboration forms to manage local services</td>
<td>• Create forms only “apparently” innovative but still dependent on public sector constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supporting action of privates operating from within the organization or as external consultants</td>
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**Abstract**

La Devolution e la politica culturale Italiana

La Devolution riveste un punto centrale nel dibattito politico italiano: ha riguardato ogni aspetto della politica pubblica negli ultimi 17 anni, e il settore culturale non ne è stato risparmiato. L’obiettivo principale è quello di decentralizzare i poteri giuridici e amministrativi in modo da ridurli il peso del lavoro degli uffici pubblici statali, e di organizzare un’amministrazione più efficiente ed efficace in grado di soddisfare le necessità dei cittadini. Dopo una lunga tradizione basata su politica e amministrazione centralizzate, procedure lunghe, costose e spesso inefficienti richiedevano un profondo cambiamento. Le riforme sono state quindi indirizzate all’implementazione di politiche pubbliche più vicine ai cittadini, a incrementare la loro partecipazione nelle decisioni di governo locali (politica di democratizzazione e partecipatività), a fornire servizi più efficienti (migliori prestazioni) e a distribuire più equamente il carico amministrativo degli uffici statali (decentralizzazione dell’amministrazione quotidiana).

**Keywords**

Cultural policy; devolution; decentralization; “managerialization”; privatization; public management.

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