

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEO-WEBERIANISM IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT

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Abstract. *Neo-Weberianism is a modern direction of public administration reform, the expression of which, to varying degrees, is increasingly being observed in various states. This direction is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis of the administration of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that coherence between vertically integrated management, a professional civil service, and the influence of civil society and communities on public decision-making is at the heart of neo-Weberianism, and becomes particularly important in the event of an emergency of this nature. Many countries choose similar or identical anti-crisis measures to combat the threat of a pandemic. However, differences in applying the principles of neo-Weberian governance can also be observed between countries. The authors of this article selected three Central European countries (EU member states) – Poland (large), Hungary (medium), and Lithuania (small) – for a more detailed analysis of pandemic management. In Poland, in order to manage the pandemic and its financial consequences in perspective, redundancies or pay cuts to some civil servants and other public sector employees in public sector organizations were modeled. Hungary had the strictest anti-pandemic quarantine of the three countries selected for analysis, and at first glance it seems that the country opted for a strict traditional hierarchical governance model for the COVID-19 crisis, but on closer*

inspection we see that the Hungarian government used population surveys and tried to take into account citizens' views on the deadlines for overcoming the pandemic. In Lithuania, by coordinating strict pandemic quarantine, the aim was to ensure the provision of high-quality information to the population.

Keywords: *Neo-Weberianism, COVID-19, pandemic management, Central European countries.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *neoveberizmas, COVID-19, pandemijos valdymas, Vidurio Europos šalys.*

Introduction

To analyze Neo-Weberianism, it should be emphasized that M. Weber's theory of bureaucracy was based on six main principles: specialization; formalized rules; a hierarchical structure; well-trained employees; managerial dedication; and the impartiality of management (Juknevičienė 2007). Although, according to M. Weber, bureaucracy is the most rational and efficient of all forms of administration (Smalskys et al. 2015), this model of governance, due to flaws in its practical application and "changing trends in political and economical thought," also has to change in order to respond to the needs of society and ensure the flexibility of organizations (Raipa 2001).

Neo-Weberianism is a modern direction of public administration reform, the expression of which is, to varying degrees, increasingly noticeable in the European Union and other countries around the world. The concept of neo-Weberianism is thought to have been used in political sciences, sociology, and public administration since the 1970s (Bercu 2012; Głuc 2018; Ramos and Milanese 2018). The need for neo-Weberianism in modern public management systems is often explained by the complex problems in public sector institutions and the civil service caused by New Public Management. The biggest criticism of the latter relates to the weakening of state institutions and the expanded role of supranational institutions for many governments (Dunn and Miller 2007). Neo-Weberianism is often considered a stage in the development of post-New Public Management public administration (Demir 2018, 152–153; Peters 2017, 610). On the other hand, N. Hyndman and M. Liguori emphasize that there has been an attitude in the discourse of public administration which suggests that, in response to problems, New Public Management will be replaced by New Public Governance, just as New Public Management replaced traditional public administration. Interestingly, the implementation of public administration reforms does not necessarily replace the principles of the existing model with new ones; old values are not necessarily eliminated, and rather new reforms become a new layer on top of previous reforms (Bringselius and Thomason 2017, 157–158). It can be assumed that this is a characteristic of neo-Weberianism. This article argues that the application of neo-Weberian principles could significantly contribute to the successful management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The article also aims to examine the essential features of neo-Weberianism, the historical reasons for the development of this concept, and the importance of neo-Weberianism for the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in three Central European countries – Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania. These states were selected based on their close historical experience in public administration, traditions, and social, economic, and cultural aspects. To achieve this aim, the authors will use the methods of: the analysis of scientific literature, documents, and legal acts; historical analysis; synthesis; and generalization.

The causes and most important elements of the formation of neo-Weberianism

New Public Management in continental Europe and other states spread from the Anglo-Saxon states, and these reforms were particularly promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These reforms began around 1980 and spread in 1990. It is this period that marks the dominance of neo-liberal governments and the crisis of the traditional welfare state (Drechsler 2009, 8). When analyzing the reasons for the formation of neo-Weberianism, it is important to understand that this direction of reforms was determined by the failure of the Anglo-Saxon New Public Management reforms to ensure the stable functioning of state institutions. Debureaucratization programs, decentralization, and performance measurement led to conflicting results. A competitive environment among institutions and civil servants and the weak regulation of public policy implementation processes caused various problems, highlighting the lack of predictable activities, institutional openness, responsibility, accountability, and cooperation. The over-emphasis of the New Public Management reforms on output and economic efficiency (e.g., budgetary discipline programs, restructuring, and reorganization programs) has led to a departure from traditional public management values such as equality and stability. These reforms led to institutional fragmentation and did not ensure effective political control of the civil service. Historically, since around 2005, New Public Management has no longer been considered a viable concept (Dunn and Miller 2007, 350–355; Bercu 2012; Reiter and Klenk 2018, 12; Drechsler 2009, 10). These dysfunctions in public administration have intensified particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, when civil society expected swift, clear decisions, inter-institutional cooperation, transparency, and accountability in decision-making. However, real public management practices, e.g., in Lithuania, revealed that institutions delay decision-making, procurements required for a pandemic are not organized transparently and take a lot of time, resources are lacking, strong competition is emerging at the communicational level, and institutions do not operate as a unified system, which is a prerequisite for managing a pandemic. As explained by G. Peters (2017, 610), more integrated top-down service delivery leads to greater accountability for potential failures to specific individuals, making them easier to identify.

When examining the concept and principles of neo-Weberianism, it is useful to refer to the general features of neo-Weberianism distinguished by the classics of public governance, C. Pollitt and G. Bouckaert (2011): i) such re-establishment of the state role that would ensure decisions because of globalization, technological change, changing demographics, and environmental threats; ii) re-establishing the state role as an element of the legitimacy of representative democracy (central, regional, and local) in the state machinery; iii) an appropriate and innovative reformulation of the role of administrative law while preserving key principles such as the compatibility of citizens-state relations, including equality before the law, privacy, legal certainty, and the legal compatibility of state action; and iv) preserving the idea of civil service, having in mind its special status, culture, and, less than before, its terms and conditions (Rakšnys and Guogis 2016, 120–121). The features singled out by the authors are important because they highlight both the tracing and the importance of: the balance of values, the need for legal certainty, and a strong civil service.

It can be argued that the neo-Weberian model is more focused not on efficiency and flexibility, but on quality, predictability, and equality; it focuses more on input and process aspects of an organization, whereas New Public Management is focused on output aspects. Consequently, to ensure the stability of institutions, not only the measurement of activities but also the competencies of civil servants and selection processes become an important factor, and great attention is

paid to the professional development of civil servants (Bringselius and Thomason 2017, 156–159). The basic idea of the neo-Weberian model can be considered to address the fact that traditional bureaucracy was characterized by important values, despite the often-mentioned problems due to a lack of flexibility and high formalism (Peters 2017, 610).

E. Reginato et al. (2014, 602), based on the insights of Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011), explain that, retrospectively, the ideas of the New Public Management reforms were mostly promoted by the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. In contrast, in continental Europe, the ideas of neo-Weberianism are represented by countries such as Belgium, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Germany (at the municipal level). The authors note that the wave of these reforms first reached Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands, and only then Belgium, France, Italy, and Germany. It can be assumed that this is related to the social cultures (e.g., strong traditions of individualism, competition in society, and their compatibility with the ideas of New Public Management) and historically established traditions of administration in continental Europe, e.g., *Rechtsstaat*. It should be noted that the movement towards the principles of neo-Weberianism is also noticeable in Central and Eastern European countries. Most of these states will face the following challenges identified by T. Raandma-Liiv (2009): i) minimal or strong state (role of the state, legacy of communist regimes, difficult basis for the development of democratic processes, little support for strong states); ii) the balance of flexibility and stability (excessive structural change in the administration); iii) increased regulation and deregulation; and iv) fragmentation or unity (decentralization or coordination mechanisms, lack of generalists in the civil service) (Gluc 2018, 52–53). On the other hand, it should be noted that neo-Weberianism is a more normative model and the principles of its implementation may vary depending on the national-cultural context (Ramos and Milanese 2018, 266).

Other authors, e.g., F. Demir (2018, 153), based on the aforementioned classics, emphasize the need for neo-Weberian state institutions to focus on the needs of citizens rather than just bureaucratic rules, but sometimes to achieve better quality of public services and culture through market mechanisms. An important aspect, especially in the face of global crises such as COVID-19, is the ability to consult with various stakeholders and take into account citizens' opinions. Efficient management of state resources, focusing not only on procedures but also on the final result, should also be noted. However, these aims are difficult to achieve without a professional civil service that can not only focus on the implementation of classical functions but can also take care of the needs of citizens. The pursuit of efficient use of public resources, in the context of neo-Weberianism, is also inseparable from public and private sector partnership programs, which can help effectively meet the needs of citizens by exploiting cross-sectoral benefits (Bercu 2012, 16), e.g., various vaccination or research programs involving private clinics and laboratories in the context of COVID-19.

The importance of the principles of neo-Weberianism in the context of various public administration reforms can also be explained by the need for stability in state management. In contrast to the context of New Public Management, which sought to focus on results and quantitative indicators, current trends in public governance relate to the need for stability. Opposing the principles of New Public Management sees a return to the idea that the public sector is different from the private sector, and that changes in public governance are not necessarily a panacea – they also have high risks that have to be evaluated and measured. This is because the public sector is responsible for public stability and ensuring the interests of the most vulnerable social groups, e.g., children, grandparents, and people with disabilities, so it is important to ensure transparency and standard-

ization of processes (Bringselius and Thomason 2017, 156–160). On the other hand, the transition from the concept of New Public Management may be incremental, or these models may complement each other. As K. Gluc (2018, 62–63) describes, the situation of public governance in Poland in the water and sewage sector is a situation where, although some elements of neo-Weberianism are clearly visible in state regulation, practices (the centralization of certain functions, increased forms of central control, and the growing role of central public administration, legalism, and administrative law) still exhibit strong elements of New Public Management. These elements are economic calculation, professional management, primacy of efficiency, and effectiveness. Hence, we can conclude that New Public Management is not being replaced by neo-Weberianism, but the system is moving incrementally towards a hybrid model. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize that the author draws these conclusions by examining the activities of a specific Polish public policy implementation sector, while the situation in Poland as a whole is closer to the ideas of neo-Weberianism. Thus, it can be said that neo-Weberianism is not a panacea, and that this trend of public governance reforms, like New Public Management, has certain advantages and disadvantages.

Table 1. Comparison of the advantages of New Public Management and the neo-Weberian model

New Public Management	Neo-Weberianism
The focus is on market mechanisms and methods, not on the state; the state becomes a service provider, and citizens are seen as clients who need consumer guarantees.	A response to the distortions of public management in order to strengthen the state: “Merit with Flexibility.”
Does not work if certain preliminary conditions are missing (providing resources seen in advance, the ethos of public service or the creation of credible professional politics).	A response to the crisis of the welfare state by intelligent state participation with country-specific characteristics.
Is based on an erroneous assumption: it is not possible to solve everything based on the absolute logic of the market; in this sense, no market approach to the state and to the public sector is possible.	The state must initiate in order to ensure the efficient operation of the market and launch and preserve economic growth.
Reason: the operation of the state is based on market principles.	Key point: rethinking the role of the state in order to strengthen the state.

<p>Consequence:</p> <p>emptying the center;</p> <p>violating the requirements of accountability and political liability;</p> <p>violating the principle of equal treatment;</p> <p>weakening the legitimacy of central institutions;</p> <p>cutting back the power of the state.</p>	<p>Consequence:</p> <p>rediscovery of bureaucracy;</p> <p>recovery of a norm-based approach;</p> <p>rolling back corruption;</p> <p>reducing poverty;</p> <p>widening democracy;</p> <p>empathy seen toward particularism.</p>
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Source: Stumpf (2009, 412–413).

As we can see, to justify the need for a neo-Weberian state, Table 1 emphasizes the need for both strong public institutions and a strong civil service to adequately respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

Differences between New Public Management and Neo-Weberianism lead to the discussion of why, in crisis situations, “big government” is a better solution than “small state.” Some authors state that “big government” (commonly understood as a government characterized by extensive regulative powers and high levels of taxation and public expenditure) is a source of “bad government” (Persson and Rothstein 2015, 231): it costs too much, it is inflexible, and it crowds out the private sector. Furthermore, “big government” is dependent on bureaucrats and short-term political decisions, and has nothing in common with effectiveness because its responsiveness is too weak (Abelson 1981).

However, as a result of liberal ideas and an individualistic approach, there is some objective evidence that changes in governance (such as contracting, public-private partnerships, and various other interactions with the private sector) move the government away from its main role and have no direct influence on the processes (Peters and Pierre 1998) which are essential in crisis situations.

It is important that all changes or improvements to public services mean that governments spend more money, employ more people, and constitute a more pervasive influence on the lives of citizens (Peters 2001), but bigger governments seem to be less corrupt than smaller ones (Persson and Rothstein 2015, 232).

The need for neo-Weberianism is noticeable not only in the countries of continental Europe, but also in other countries, e.g., in Latin America. Public governance reforms in Uruguay, characterized by the features of the neo-Weberian state, were oriented towards strengthening the career civil service system to make it more flexible by forming a more motivating salary structure. At the highest levels of careers in the civil service, leadership positions were created for managers who had to go through management training processes with a focus on planning and leadership. However, these initiatives were not implemented systematically, although they were legally approved. This can be explained by the fact that economic growth provided an opportunity to improve the salaries of civil servants, but the pursuit of a systematic reform of the management of human resources in the civil service requires substantial investment that does not yield rapid results. There was also a lack of political consensus as to the direction of systemic reforms (Ramos and Milanesi 2018, 268–272). This lack of political consensus is also relevant in the context of Lithuanian public governance, where elements of New Public Management, New Public Governance, and neo-We-

berianism can be detected.

Neo-Weberian principles remain relevant in Central European countries. For example, A. Raipa observes that the Central and Eastern European countries, not having had the opportunity to implement public governance reforms in a long-term, almost permanent way (as Western countries did), had to force the modernization of the public sector by centralizing management to catch up with the West (Raipa 2014). However, in the opinion of the authors of this article, the modernization of public governance in Central European countries has led to many manifestations of civil society (the formation of civic communities, etc.). Therefore, the centralization of reforms was followed by an increase in the influence of civil society and citizens' groups in decision-making. Manifestations of neo-Weberianism are also observed in Romania. As a member of the European Union, Romania was influenced by supranational institutions and by the ideas of the New Public Management reforms, but its real administrative practice is closer to the principles of neo-Weberianism, especially when analyzing the functioning of its civil service (Bercu 2012, 17).

According to the OECD (2021), the COVID-19 crisis consisted of: a health crisis; an economic crisis; and the negative impact of the health and economic crisis on subnational government expenditure and revenue. During this crisis, regions were not all affected in the same way and the medium-and long-term impact will vary significantly across regions. The role and the importance of strong national government in this context appear when analyzing the importance of effective multi-level governance in managing crises. Key elements of success during this emergency included: mobilizing and coordinating multiple policy sectors and all levels of government; clear leadership, balanced with effective coordination, consultation, and a collaborative approach among government and non-government actors; and reinforcing trust in public institutions (OECD 2021, 96). This highlights the need for central government to show leadership and coordinate the entire process.

In summary, the direction of reforms in the neo-Weberian state is characterized by the need for strong state institutions and a strong civil service. On the other hand, it seems that certain elements of New Public Management and New Public Governance are also maintained. The need for neo-Weberian provisions becomes very important in the event of a pandemic or emergency, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The importance of neo-Weberianism in Central European countries in the context of the COVID-19 crisis (the experience of Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania)

In the face of crises, public governance systems cannot function effectively and efficiently without a competent, motivated civil service and strong institutions (Drechsler 2009, 14). The COVID-19 pandemic situation tended to emphasize the strengthened role of the state, central leadership, and scientific expertise. It is undoubtedly true that state power has grown at the expense of individual freedom, but state power now is quite different from how it was understood in M. Weber's theory of bureaucracy. Governments have shown that they are completely dependent on citizens because of the many spontaneous bottom-up initiatives that have kept society functional (Brandsen and Steen 2020, 851). All levels of government have had to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, because this crisis "has shed new light on a lack of regional resilience and amplified existing weaknesses, including territorial disparities in access to healthcare and housing, demographic changes, digital gaps across metropolitan and rural areas" (OECD 2021, 96). In many countries it has also shown a lack of balanced regional policy and integrated planning, and highlighted the need for governmental reaction.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that countries, even as members of international organizations (e.g., the EU), give priority to the needs of the people of their country rather than a supranational entity when centralizing their governance and human resources in healthcare management. On the other hand, as already mentioned, the centralization of public governance does not refuse the help of citizens and their communities. Coherence between vertically integrated governance and the influence of civil society and communities on public authority decisions makes up the essence of neo-Weberianism, and became particularly important during the emergency associated with the threat of COVID-19.

When analyzing the principles of neo-Weberianism, the authors of this article (themselves coming from the Central European country of Lithuania) evaluated the implementation of these principles in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in several countries in the region they are familiar with. This choice allowed a detailed overview and a comparison of how public governance solutions are modelled among culturally and historically close Central European countries in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Central European countries (EU Member States) faced serious challenges when trying to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, it can be noted that some Central European countries introduced strict legal regulatory mechanisms to ensure the safety of their citizens (Szyja 2020).

At first glance, such a tightening of legislation presupposes the idea that, in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, a vertically integrated, hierarchical, classic public administration is returning. However, this is a false observation. This statement is opposed by Polish researcher P. Szyja (2020), who believes that in addition to the realities of tightening, there is visible cooperation between public administration and interest groups and communities, and intensive communication with citizens (through the media, social networks, etc.) to provide more detailed information on the consequences of the pandemic. This course of pandemic regulation confirms the position chosen by the authors of this article that the neo-Weberian model is based, on the one hand, on strict, vertically integrated legal regulation. On the other hand, it is built on the aspiration to cooperate with citizens and, in pandemic conditions, the aspiration to attempt to explain to citizens the essence of tightening governance via communication. All of this does not contradict the European Union *Acquis Communautaire*, where the principles of neo-Weberianism are reflected through the principles of reliability and predictability which can be used, for example, to provide public services and to avoid bias in decisions. In practice, this means that public authorities, in accordance with the rules, ensure the possibilities of vertical administrative solutions, strict procedural justice, proportionality, and professional integrity. Other guiding principles of the *Acquis Communautaire* relate to the openness and transparency of governance, e.g., it must be possible to inspect and monitor the activities of a public organization, and its decisions can be influenced by citizens and their communities (Smalskys et al., 2015).

P. Szyja (2020) states that many countries have formed special commissions (under their governments) to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Some Central European countries, such as Estonia, Slovenia, and Lithuania, have developed relevant legal acts to deal with the emergency situation. This legislation allows special commissions under the governments of those countries to accelerate and abruptly adjust anti-crisis decisions according to the situation. In the field of human resource management, these countries transferred most of their employees in public sector organizations and civil servants to remote working in order to try to prevent COVID-19 infections in the workplace. Taking into account the concerns and wishes of the population to receive high-quality

administrative and public services in the conditions of the pandemic, decisions were implemented to extend the validity of various certificates and documents, defer taxes, accelerate the issuance of benefits to employees of companies that do not operate during the pandemic quarantine, etc.

It was mentioned in this article that neo-Weberianism is associated with the concept of a strong state and the professionalism of the civil service on the one hand, and with the activity of citizens and their groups on the other. So how are these seemingly incompatible principles reflected in the efforts of the selected Central European countries to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic? As already mentioned, the authors of the article selected Central European countries for analysis of their implementation of the principles of neo-Weberianism during the conditions of the pandemic. This article discusses the general trends and aspirations to overcome the pandemic in Central European countries. Many of the measures taken to tackle this health crisis are universal. On the other hand, a more detailed analysis makes it possible to identify certain differences in the application of the neo-Weberian management model during pandemic conditions. For a more detailed analysis, and to provide a more objective picture of the management of the pandemic, the authors of the article chose a large, a medium, and a small Central European country. These countries are Poland (more than 38 million inhabitants), Hungary (more than 9 million inhabitants), and Lithuania (around 3 million inhabitants).

Poland, the largest country in Central Europe, met the COVID-19 pandemic with similar pandemic management principles as other countries. Remote work was gradually introduced from March 2020, and in December 2020, when the second wave of the pandemic started, the Polish Government adopted a decision allowing public sector organizations to switch to remote working again. Heads of the departments of the public sector acquired the right, at their discretion and depending on the course of the pandemic, to allow workers to work remotely (Czechowicz 2020). One of the points of the resolution adopted by the Polish Government also emphasized the importance of quality service to citizens during the conditions of the pandemic. Thus, conditions had to be evaluated not only for online services but also, taking into account the requests of the elderly, for communication via telephone (Czechowicz 2020). Analyzing the Polish Government's resolution (*Ustawa o szczególnych rozwiązaniach... 2021, Art. 3*), we see that it relates to a vertically integrated top-down decree: that is, the Government states from above how the entire public administration should operate during the pandemic, and obliges various public authorities to take into account the needs of the population and their groups. Judging from the theoretical perspective of public governance, this decision clearly shows the neo-Weberian principles of vertically integrated administration and consideration of the needs of the population.

J. Itrich-Drabarek (2020) notes that there was a debate in Poland about the role and size of the civil service during the pandemic. This discussion was provoked by the Government's anti-crisis plan, which, modeling the country's unfavorable financial situation, provided for the abolition of posts in the civil service, the reduction and suspension of salaries, and the dismissal of civil servants. Modeling such a solution would seem to contradict the principles of neo-Weberianism because, for economic reasons, reducing the civil service or limiting its staff financially in the conditions of the pandemic would mean problems when ensuring state functions and a coordination and monitoring system. According to J. Itrich-Drabarek (2020), in the fight against the pandemic, public authorities must act as a coordinated mechanism. Various preventive tools for overcoming the pandemic must be developed and the coordinated actions of various ministries must be implemented for organizing the delivery of vaccines and medical equipment, ensuring education for various age groups, receiving social benefits, etc. All of these decisions are implemented by the

ministries (together with the local government), and the majority of the staff implementing these decisions are civil servants. These modeled downsizing solutions, albeit for economic reasons, would demotivate employees and create problems when assuring the quality of the Government's pandemic plans. Moreover, J. Itrich-Drabarek relies on a prominent civil service researcher: C. Demmke (quoted in Itrich-Drabarek 2020). The latter researcher, when analyzing the dismissal of civil servants during the economic crisis, only confirmed the fact that the dismissal of civil servants or the reduction of their salaries during the crisis clearly has a negative effect on their job satisfaction, confidence, and involvement in the decisions made and implemented by public authorities.

It could be argued that the decisions modeled by the Polish Government (in terms of the civil service) can be linked not so much to neo-Weberian provisions as to traditional hierarchical governance (a top-down government anti-crisis plan) and the provisions of New Public Management (when saving during a crisis situation, a business organization dismisses employees or reduces their salaries) (Itrich-Drabarek 2020). This anti-crisis plan, which has not yet been fully implemented in Poland, has, as expected, received a negative reaction from civil servants. On April 7, 2020, an influential association of graduates of the National School of Public Administration addressed the Speaker of the Polish Parliament, claiming that the reduction in the number of civil servants or their salaries was inconsistent with the Polish Constitution. Members of this association also stressed that the pandemic could turn into an economic crisis. In times of crisis, when unemployment rises, the state, as the main employer, must help to safeguard jobs, not reduce them (Itrich-Drabarek 2020). It is believed that the Polish government will listen to the concerns of the members of such an influential association and adjust its modeled anti-crisis decisions (in terms of the civil service) taking into account the views of the associated groups representing civil servants. Such a statement, which is not as optimistic as the claim of Polish researcher J. Itrich-Drabarek (2020), would be partially confirmed by the report of the Head of the Polish Civil Service for 2020. Their report was issued in March 2021, and also modeled changes for 2021. From this report, we see that the head of the Polish civil service placed particular emphasis on ensuring the stable employment of civil servants and strong social guarantees for civil servants. On the other hand, during the pandemic, there was a "freeze" on the salary and bonus fund for modelers of Polish civil servants. Such a "freeze" on salaries and bonuses is an unpopular but temporary process given the state of public finances during a pandemic (Sprawozdanie Szefa służby cywilnej, o stanie służby cywilnej... 2020). An anti-crisis plan regulated vertically by the government and the opinion of civil service experts would be a shift towards the implementation of neo-Weberian provisions.

An even more interesting management practice for the COVID-19 pandemic was identified in Hungary. In Hungary, from March 11 to June 18, 2020, a state of emergency was introduced, giving more power to the Hungarian government. After this difficult period, from June 19 to November 3, 2020, the emergency regime was alleviated and was in a state described as epidemiological preparedness, giving less power to the Government and more to the Hungarian Parliament in the management of the pandemic. With the increase in the number of people infected, from November 4, 2020, onwards, the Government again declared a state of emergency. Therefore, stricter rules were in place to combat COVID-19 (Szabo et al. 2020). Hungary introduced many strict anti-pandemic prohibitions, such as: strict wearing of protective masks in supermarkets, offices, social institutions, hospitals, and on public transport; and certain open spaces in cities with a population of no more than 10,000. It was prohibited to leave the house from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m., except for the cases of work, walking a dog, or sports training, and supermarkets were closed at 7 p.m. No international visitors to Hungary were allowed – except Hungarian citizens, who were obliged to

quarantine themselves for ten days (Szabo et al. 2020). However, there were no restrictions on the civil service nor attempts to reduce the number of civil servants in Hungary. As can be seen at first glance, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Hungary is not reminiscent of a neo-Weberian governance model, but rather an implementation of the traditional hierarchical model of public governance during the pandemic.

However, such an approach is deceptive. Why? Firstly, in Hungary, the national consultations of public authorities with citizens are legally established. Secondly, such consultations also took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 201,087 Hungarian citizens filled in a national consultation survey e-form on February 22, 2020. The purpose of the survey was to ask Hungarian citizens about which of the state of emergency restrictions caused by the pandemic should be eliminated (and whether gradually or all at once) (CORONAVIRUS: Here's the Latest 2021). In the late summer and early autumn of 2020, as the pandemic subsided, the Hungarian government eased pandemic restrictions. However, as early as mid-February of 2021, following the rise in numbers of COVID-19 cases, anti-COVID restrictions were gradually introduced. In the first phase of restrictions, businesses (excluding restaurants and bars) were allowed to operate and schools (up to 8th grade) remained open. It was only in early March that the Hungarian government ordered the closure of some businesses and primary schools. One of the most restrictive bans that was introduced was the total ban on public meetings (Kovacz 2021). In our view, such a permanent process of introducing anti-pandemic bans has demonstrated the Hungarian Government's ability to address the challenges of COVID-19, taking into account the needs of the population.

This combination of top-down pandemic management policies and population surveys is an indication that the neo-Weberian model has been being implemented in Hungary to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Lithuania, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the year of the elections to the Seimas (Parliament) in the country. After the elections, when the political majority changed, the Lithuanian Government also changed. The pandemic management system in the programming provisions of both governments remained similar. As far as quarantine restrictions are concerned, due to the seasonal increase in the number of infected people in November 2020, similar quarantine restrictions as in other countries and Poland and Hungary were introduced. The pandemic has been managed by the tightening of constraints (at central and local levels of public governance) and by vertically integrated decisions (with the help of regulatory acts to manage the pandemic). Furthermore, all government-level decisions emphasized the importance of communication with the population and evidence (argument)-based public information (COVID-19 valdymo strategija... 2020). Legal documents emphasized a controlled exit from quarantine and strict epidemiological controls, as well as requiring each public authority to have specific action plans to manage the pandemic. The Polish author P. Szyja (2020) has already written about the special commission for managing the pandemic crisis in Lithuania (and in other countries). However, this author's data on the special commission has become obsolete. Although she published her scientific article in December 2020, she collected scientific material for the article and conducted analysis in the beginning and middle of that year, so she could not have known about the changes in the activities of the special commission.

During 2020, in addition to the Government's COVID-19 Committee (a special Commission), the powers of the Head of State Emergency Operations (the Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania was appointed to this position) increased significantly, and a duplicative and

parallel structure was created to manage the pandemic (COVID-19 valdymo strategija... 2020). This separation of the functions of the institutions responsible for pandemic management did not serve to increase the quality of the pandemic management process; therefore, after the 2020 Seimas (Parliamentary) elections, the newly formed Government centralized pandemic crisis management in the hands of the Head of State Emergency Operations and a group of advisers under the Government was reformed and established, which advised the Government and the Head of State Emergency Operations on the matters of pandemic management. In the conditions of the pandemic, the Lithuanian Government emphasized the importance of professionalism in civil service, and the rhetoric of reducing the number of civil servants was not heard, even when governments changed. From the decisions taken by the Lithuanian Government to manage the pandemic, we see that on the one hand, strict restrictions were applied to overcome the pandemic; on the other hand, the aim was to fully inform the public about applicable restrictions (*Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės nutarimas... 2020*). This proves that a neo-Weberian governance model was applied in Lithuania to eliminate the consequences of the pandemic.

The question may arise as to the role of the help of public, commercial, semi-private, private, and cooperative companies in addressing the challenges of the pandemic and providing healthcare institutions with medical equipment and COVID-19 tests. If it is beneficial for the state and society, then neo-Weberian governance does not reject the principles of public and private partnership. It can be assumed that different forms of ownership have helped healthcare institutions to obtain the necessary equipment, etc. However, private initiatives cannot help provide COVID-19 vaccines – as all three countries are members of the European Union, this is the prerogative of the European Commission.

Conclusions

The reform direction of the neo-Weberian state is characterized by the need for a strong, competent civil service and governance stability, which can be compatible with taking into account the views and needs of the citizens and their groups. This was especially relevant in solving the problems caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. At the same time, certain elements of New Public Management and New Public Governance are also observed. This combination of policy measures representing features of different public governance models and proven measures of various directions of public governance reforms can be combined and applied effectively.

The analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic administration processes in different countries shows that coherence among vertically integrated management, professional civil service, and the influence of civil society and communities on public authorities' decisions form the essence of neo-Weberianism and became particularly important during the COVID-19 emergency.

The anti-pandemic measures of the selected Central European countries – whether large (Poland), medium (Hungary), or small (Lithuania) – were similar. However, some differences were identified when applying the principles of neo-Weberian governance:

In Poland, to manage the pandemic and its financial consequences in the future, redundancies or salary cuts to parts of the civil service and other public sector employees were modeled. Although the redundancies of civil servants and public sector employees have not yet begun, such modeling would, in part, contradict the neo-Weberian provision regarding the importance of a professional civil service to ensure quality governance.

Hungary had the strictest anti-pandemic quarantine of all three countries selected for analysis, and, at first glance, it seems that the country opted for a strict traditional hierarchical govern-

ance model for the COVID-19 crisis. However, on closer inspection, we can see that the Hungarian Government used population surveys and tried to take into account citizens' opinions on the deadlines for overcoming the pandemic.

In Lithuania, while coordinating strict pandemic quarantine, the aim was to ensure the provision of high-quality information to the population. However, there were problems in managing the crisis: in addition to the COVID-19 Committee brought together by the Government to overcome the crisis, the powers of the Head of State Emergency Operations increased and the functions of these two institutions started to duplicate, affecting the pandemic management processes. The current Government has again centralized the pandemic management process.

Despite the small differences between these countries, it is necessary to reaffirm that the Central European countries such as the Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania, which have been specifically selected for this analysis, apply the neo-Weberian principles of governance. These principles, combining hierarchical management, the professionalism of the civil service in making and implementing high-quality anti-crisis solutions, cooperation with the citizens and their groups, and the constant informing of residents about anti-crisis provisions taken on by public authorities, is the most effective way to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Neovėberizmo svarba COVID-19 pasaulinės pandemijos valdymo kontekste

Santrauka. *Neovėberizmas yra moderni viešojo administravimo reformų kryptis, kurios raiška skirtinga apimtimi vis dažniau pastebima įvairiose valstybėse. Ši kryptis ypač aktuali COVID-19 pandemijos kontekste. Išanalizavus COVID-19 pandemijos administravimą matyti, kad vertikaliai integruoto valdymo, profesionalios valstybės tarnybos ir pilietinės visuomenės bei bendruomenių įtakos viešųjų sprendimų priėmimui nuoseklumas yra neovėberizmo pagrindas ir tampa ypač svarbus ekstremalios situacijos, kurią sukėlė koronaviruso pandemija, sąlygomis. Daug šalių kovai su pandemijos grėsme pasirenka panašias arba identiškas antikrizines priemones, tačiau taip pat pastebimi skirtumai tarp šalių taikant neovėberizmo valdymo principus. Šio straipsnio autoriai išsamesnei pandemijos valdymo analizei pasirinko tris Vidurio Europos šalis (ES valstybes nares) – Lenkijos Respubliką (didelę šalį), Vengriją (vidutinę šalį) ir Lietuvos Respubliką (mažą šalį). Siekiant perspektyviai valdyti pandemiją ir jos finansines pasekmes Lenkijos Respublikoje, buvo modeliuojamas dalies valstybės tarnautojų ir kitų viešojo sektoriaus organizacijų darbuotojų atleidimas arba atlyginimų mažinimas. Vengrijoje yra griežčiausias karantinas iš trijų analizei atrinktų šalių, tad iš pirmo žvilgsnio atrodo, kad šalis pasirinko griežtą tradicinį hierarchinį COVID-19 krizės valdymo modelį, tačiau atidžiau pažvelgus matyti, kad Vengrijos vyriausybė remiasi gyventojų apklausomis ir bando atsižvelgti į piliečių nuomonę dėl pandemijos įveikimo priemonių ir terminų. Derinant griežtą pandemiją karantiną Lietuvos Respublikoje, siekiama užtikrinti kokybišką gyventojų informavimą.*

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