


Policy Diffusion and Policy Learning: international cooperation between MARE and Great Britain in Brazil's 1995 Managerial Reform

Difusão e Aprendizado de Políticas Públicas: a cooperação internacional do MARE com a Grã-Bretanha na Reforma Gerencial de 1995

Leonardo Queiroz Leite 

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Abstract: This article examines a specific facet of the international connections underpinning the 1995 Brazilian Managerial Reform, with a focus on the technical cooperation established with the United Kingdom, whose reformist experience significantly influenced Brazil. It explores how this external influence was processed and assimilated by the Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform (MARE) between 1995 and 1998, during the first term of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, highlighting the British inspiration behind the Brazilian reform and linking it to theoretical concepts from the field of public policy analysis, such as policy learning and policy diffusion. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, grounded in the articulation between a specialized literature review—focused on public policy analysis and state reform—and an interpretive analysis of empirical data. This theoretical-empirical dialogue privileges in-depth interviews with key actors from MARE, used as primary sources to “give voice to the actors” involved in the technical-political process under examination. Although the Brazilian literature on the 1995 managerial reform is extensive, theoretically grounded empirical studies exploring its connections to international technical cooperation and the transnational circulation of administrative ideas remain scarce. In sum, the article seeks to broaden the field of research on public management and international technical cooperation in Brazil by examining, through an empirical and theoretically informed approach, the connections between the 1995 reform

and foreign experiences regarded at the time as global benchmarks. At last, the analysis contributes to a more refined understanding of how public management practices, ideas, and concepts originating in other national contexts were reinterpreted and adapted to the Brazilian administrative agenda of the 1990s, thereby shedding light on policy formulation processes in environments shaped by international exchange.

Palavras-chave: international cooperation; public management; managerial reform; public policies; brazilian public administration.

Resumo: O artigo examina uma faceta das conexões internacionais da reforma gerencial brasileira de 1995, com foco na cooperação técnica estabelecida com a Grã-Bretanha, cuja experiência reformista influenciou significativamente o Brasil. Dessa maneira, o texto explora como essa influência externa foi processada e assimilada pelo Ministério da Administração e Reforma do Estado (MARE), entre 1995 e 1998, durante o primeiro governo FHC, destacando a inspiração inglesa da reforma brasileira. Fundamentalmente, discutiremos se essa experiência de intercâmbio internacional em matéria de reforma administrativa configurou, na prática, uma materialização empírica dos conceitos teóricos do campo da análise de políticas públicas, tais como "aprendizado de políticas públicas" e de "difusão de políticas públicas". A metodologia do estudo é qualitativa e fundamenta-se na articulação entre uma revisão bibliográfica especializada — voltada à literatura de análise de políticas públicas e de reforma do Estado — e uma análise interpretativa de dados empíricos primários e secundários. Essa interlocução teórico-empírica privilegia entrevistas em profundidade com atores-chave do MARE, fontes primárias e secundárias empregadas no trabalho a fim de "dar voz aos atores" envolvidos no processo técnico-político assinalado. Embora a literatura brasileira sobre a reforma de 1995 seja extensa, são ainda escassos os estudos teórico-empíricos que investigam suas conexões com processos de cooperação técnica internacional e circulação transnacional de ideias administrativas. Em suma, o trabalho busca ampliar o campo de estudos sobre gestão pública e cooperação técnica internacional no Brasil, ao examinar de forma empírica e guiada por fundamentos teóricos as conexões entre a reforma gerencial de 1995 e experiências estrangeiras tidas como referências mundiais à época. Portanto, a análise permite compreender e visualizar como práticas, ideias e conceitos de gestão pública oriundas de outros contextos nacionais foram reinterpretadas e adaptadas à agenda administrativa brasileira da década de 1990, contribuindo assim para o entendimento mais refinado dos processos de formulação de políticas em ambientes de intercâmbio de experiências internacionais.

Keywords: cooperação internacional; gestão pública; reforma gerencial; políticas públicas; administração pública brasileira.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article addresses the international interfaces established by the 1995 Managerial Reform¹ in Brazil, particularly discussing the importance of the technical cooperation forged with Great Britain², in the framework of the public management reform undertaken in that country a few years before the Brazilian experience (Bresser-Pereira, 2010; Jenkins, 1998).

To this end, we point out the extent to which this influence reverberated in Brazil and in the work carried out by the Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform (MARE) between 1995 and 1998, deepening the discussion on the English inspiration of the Brazilian reform and relating this international dimension to key concepts in the field of public policy, especially theoretical discussions on *policy learning* and *policy diffusion*.

Thus, the central objective is to understand whether cooperation with the United Kingdom constituted a process of policy transfer or, more precisely, of voluntary learning adapted to Brazilian specificities, in the light of contemporary theoretical approaches on international circulation and diffusion of policies.

Accordingly, in order to analytically operationalize this theoretical-empirical approximation, we find that the specialized literature in the field of policy analysis brings together various authors who have proposed typologies to characterize the modes of circulation and incorporation of ideas in administrative reform processes from an international perspective.

Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), for example, distinguish between voluntary and coercive transfer, direct and indirect, and point out degrees of change (inspired, adapted, copied). Rose (1991) deals with *lesson-drawing*, in which lessons are selectively extracted according to local capacities. Other authors,

¹ This article results from a specific analytical cut developed from the author's doctoral research (LEITE, 2019), but it presents its own structure, delimited objectives, and revised interpretation. The focus here is concentrated exclusively on the international dimension of the 1995 Managerial Reform, with emphasis on the technical cooperation with the United Kingdom and is not a direct or integral reproduction of chapters from the dissertation.

² It is relevant to note that the main British consultant associated with the reform, Kate Jenkins, acted in the capacity of a retired specialist from the British government, hired by MARE through the British Council, which gives the cooperation a technical-instrumental character, and not an institutional one in the strict and formal sense of cooperation between two governments. This distinction guided the interpretive analysis regarding the limits and scope of external influence in the reform's formulation process.

such as Stone (2001), emphasize the role of networks and cultural translation as central mechanisms in the transnational circulation of policy ideas. These theoretical frameworks underpin the empirical analysis conducted in this article and will be presented in the theoretical section, after the case study of cooperation between MARE and Great Britain.

Therefore, this article seeks to contribute to the debate by specifically analyzing the elements of international learning present in the formulation of the Brazilian managerial reform, since, according to the literature review undertaken considering the empirical findings of this study, there remain few analyses that address in depth and detail the international influence based on primary empirical sources, especially in the form of international technical cooperation and policy learning.

Thus, by shedding light on this little-explored facet of the literature, the article intends to diversify existing analytical approaches, offering a case study that combines theoretical contributions from the literature with empirical grounding in primary and secondary sources, allowing us to observe the mechanisms of circulation and their adaptation of managerial practices, concepts and ideas to Brazilian political and institutional conditions through the deliberate action of MARE in direct exchange with the British and their managerialism model.

The structure of the article is organized into three main sections. The first presents the methodological procedures adopted, with emphasis on the qualitative approach, on the use of in-depth interviews, and on the articulation between empirical evidence and specialized literature. The second section reconstructs the process of technical cooperation between MARE and Great Britain, detailing the mechanisms through which foreign consultants participated in the formulation of the Brazilian managerial reform. The third section mobilizes the theoretical framework on diffusion, circulation, and policy learning, seeking to interpret the empirical case in light of recent theoretical approaches in the field of public policy analysis. Finally, the concluding remarks synthesize the study's findings, its analytical implications, and potential contributions to

understanding policy formulation processes in contexts of international exchange of ideas and managerial practices in administrative reform.

2. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The approach of this study is qualitative, adopting the case study method, centered on the international interfaces of the 1995 Managerial Reform, with emphasis on the technical cooperation between the Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform (MARE) and Great Britain. The qualitative approach proves to be the most adequate when the aim is to understand meanings, interpretations, and senses attributed by the actors themselves involved in institutional processes. It is a strategy that makes it possible to capture the complexity of political and administrative interactions in their context, without reducing them to fixed patterns or predetermined categories (Flick, 2002; Van Thiel, 2014). This approach values analytical depth and interpretive flexibility, especially useful in studies that involve policy formulation and the circulation of ideas.

The case study, by enabling the in-depth analysis of a phenomenon situated in its real context, is particularly suitable for investigating complex political processes, marked by multiple sources of evidence and institutional dynamics that are not controllable in an experimental environment (Yin, 2005). Furthermore, such a methodological strategy allows for the interpretive reconstruction of trajectories and institutional choices, offering empirical support for understanding the mechanisms of circulation of ideas and learning in public policies.

The empirical delimitation adopted in this study responds to the need to deepen a dimension still little explored in the Brazilian literature on the 1995 managerial reform: international dialogue structured around technical cooperation with the United Kingdom. This choice is grounded both in the density of the available empirical material — interviews, official documents, and records of technical missions — and in the relevance attributed by the reformers themselves to the British experience as a practical and conceptual reference in

designing the Brazilian model of managerial reform. This focus thus allows us to observe with accuracy the mechanisms of institutional learning and the selective circulation of administrative ideas across different national contexts.

Among the methods employed, a literature review was conducted through bibliographic research in books, scientific articles, theses, and dissertations in the field of Public Administration. It is important to highlight here the centrality of certain texts produced during the period of conception and implementation of the Brazilian managerial reform, whose relevance derives from their dual condition — analytical and memorial.

These are studies that combine theoretical elaboration with direct inscription in events, constituting privileged records of the reformist experience. In this set, the works of Bresser-Pereira (1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2009, 2010), Pacheco (1999, 2004), Santana (2015), Gaetani (2000, 2005), Jenkins (1998, 2008) and Jenkins & Plowden (2006) stand out, whose contributions consolidated as fundamental interpretive sources for understanding the genesis and developments of the managerial reform in Brazil in its international dimensions.

In the case of texts produced by actors directly involved in the formulation of the reform, their centrality is also justified because they play a dual role: they are at the same time qualified testimonies of the decision-making process and contributions incorporated into academic literature. This hybrid condition requires that such sources be privileged in studies that seek to understand the genesis of the reform from the voices that articulated, defended, disseminated, and implemented it. However, while incorporating these references can facilitate a deeper interpretation of the reform processes from the viewpoint of their protagonists, this dual condition may also entail ambiguities and limitations, as Costa points out (2008, pp. 271–72):

[...] most works on the most recent reforms take care to recover the main antecedents of these transformation processes. Thus, there are today countless accounts, analyses, and studies on the experiences of administrative reform of the Brazilian federal public administration, with different approaches, degrees of depth, and levels of involvement with the projects. Many scholars are themselves reformers, having acted as ideologues,

mentors, managers, or agents of the reforms carried out in Brazil since the 1930s. [...] In any case, they constitute representations of the Brazilian administrative world, that is, they present themselves as symbolic forms of a State in transformation.

Beyond this, in general, the literature on administrative reforms in Brazil identified in this article presents varied nuances: some studies oscillate between institutional analyses (Abrucio, 2007; Rezende, 2004; Ferreira Costa, 2002; Miranda, 2010), academic texts by the “actor-authors” of the managerial reform (Bresser-Pereira, 1996, 1998, 2009; Pacheco, 2004; Santana, 2015), doctoral theses by former MARE officials (Santana, 2015; Fernandes, 2010b; Alcoforado, 2012), historical-political interpretations (Costa, 2008; Gaetani, 2000, 2003, 2005; Leite, 2019, 2021) and approaches centered on the figure of the policy-maker (Abrucio & Loureiro, 2004; Leite, 2014b; Leite & Capella, 2015). This selection was guided by combined criteria of theoretical relevance, consolidated recurrence in specialized literature, and direct adherence to the research problem and empirical delimitation proposed. By privileging works with strong conceptual grounding and analytical proximity to the object under investigation, the aim was to ensure interpretive depth and maintain methodological coherence in the study.

Empirically, primary data sources were mobilized through in-depth interviews (Duarte, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Alberti, 2004) with actors from the Brazilian Federal Executive branch located at MARE, who were directly involved in the construction of the managerial reform. The choice of interviewees was guided by the formulation roles they played in the reforming Ministry, especially Secretaries and directors, in addition to the use of a longer and more detailed interview with former minister Bresser Pereira.

Five in-depth interviews were conducted with former MARE leaders, strategically selected due to their direct participation in the decision-making cores of the reform and their ability to provide qualified testimonies about the technical and political backstage of the international cooperation process with the British. They are therefore privileged interlocutors, whose institutional trajectories confer empirical legitimacy and interpretive depth to the study's

corpus. The collection of primary data took place throughout 2018, in different locations, as detailed in Annex A of this work.

The choice of in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main technique for collecting primary data is justified by the need to access perceptions, meanings, and interpretations attributed by the policymakers directly involved with the international cooperation process. In this sense, the research mobilizes the perspective of thematic oral history (Alberti, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), integrating the individual narrative with the institutional structures that contextualize it.

The semi-structured interview was chosen as a technique in which the interviewer follows a pre-established script, but which can be altered according to the evolution of the interview and the interviewee's willingness to deepen or avoid certain topics (Duarte, 2004; Alberti, 2004). The data collected in the interviews were submitted to content analysis, according to Bardin's approach (2009). After detailed transcription and thorough reading of the oral records, the statements were organized into thematic categories constructed a posteriori, based on the recurrence of emerging topics related to external influence, the formulation process, and the international circulation of managerial ideas and practices. This procedure made it possible to extract interpretive patterns with analytical value, while preserving the specificities of the testimonies and their insertion in their respective institutional contexts.

In addition to the interviews conducted directly by this author, the study incorporated three other in-depth interviews available in the archive of the *Innovations for Successful Societies* (ISS) program at Princeton University, thus *totaling eight interviews that make up the empirical corpus of this study*. The complementary interviews were conducted with former minister Bresser Pereira and two former MARE directors close to the minister who interacted directly with British consultants during the Brazilian reform formulation period. These testimonies, even as secondary sources, were treated as important material for our purpose, both for the density of the narratives and the institutional proximity of the interviewees to the episodes analyzed.

From the identification of sources and subsequent collection and analysis of data, the testimonies were triangulated with official documents and specialized literature, in order to reinforce the interpretive consistency of the analysis. Triangulation, according to Zappellini & Feuerschute (2015, p.246), is a “method that uses additional data to validate or broaden the interpretations made by the researcher, adopting different perceptions to clarify meaning through the repetition of observations or interpretations”.

Thus, the empirical data were triangulated from three perspectives: (i) interviews with former MARE members; (ii) official documents, such as the Plano Diretor da Reforma do Aparelho do Estado (Brasil, 1995); and (iii) academic publications by actors deeply involved in the reform, such as the “testimonial-texts” of Bresser-Pereira (1998, 1999, 2000, 2010), the articles and books of British consultant Kate Jenkins (1998, 2006), and a book by Jenkins co-authored with another British consultant, William Plowden, who also influenced cooperation with MARE (Jenkins & Plowden, 2006). This empirical-theoretical cross-checking allowed the study to consolidate evidence of selective internalization of foreign ideas, adjusted to the conditions of the Brazilian State.

In sum, the methodological procedures adopted in this study made it possible to qualify a deeper and more detailed understanding of the role of technical-institutional cooperation with Great Britain in the process of formulating the managerial reform, from the perspective of some of its main formulators, especially those directly involved with the “external relations” of MARE, materialized in its international interactions with other countries and international organizations. In this context, the articulation between literature review and empirical analysis allowed us to reconstruct meanings, choices, and adaptations carried out within the Brazilian State, based on managerial administrative models and external experiences.

3. THE BRITISH TECHNICAL COOPERATION WITH MARE: THE BRAZILIAN EXCHANGE WITH THE LEADING EUROPEAN MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCE

Following the formulation and approval of the *Plano Diretor* (Brasil, 1995), in September 1995, several significant cooperation initiatives were established, particularly with the United Kingdom and France. The literature consulted makes it clear that the formulation of the Managerial Reform in Brazil took place under the direct influence of the British experience (Bresser-Pereira, 2009; 2010; Pacheco, 1999; Gaetani, 2003; 2005). Several senior officials from MARE visited the United Kingdom in early 1995, where they observed agencies and governmental bodies that were experimenting with managerial reform measures similar to those that would later be proposed in Brazil.

In this context, it is important to note that, throughout the trajectory of administrative reforms in Brazil, dialogue with and inspiration from international experiences is by no means an unprecedented feature of the 1995 reform. As demonstrated by Gaetani (2005), when examining three other episodes of administrative reform during the construction of the national bureaucracy, significant external influences were also identified, invariably linked to the broader “spirit of the age” prevailing at the time in which they took place.

Policy transference also took place but in different forms in all four episodes. Reformers were engaged in policy dialogue with the United States (first and second case), France (second and third case), and United Kingdom (second and fourth case). **All the reforms were informed by the Zeitgeist of their times.** The 1937 case was deeply influenced by the Brownlow report, by the Budgeting and Accounting Act of 1921, and by the Pendleton Act of 1893. The 1967 case was influenced by the dissemination of Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and System (PPBS) ideas and also informed by debates that later resulted in the Fulton Report as well as by the *modus operandi* of the French *fonction publique*. **The 1998 case benefited from a structured international dialogue with practitioners involved in the implementation of the Next Step agencies in the UK and in the dissemination of new public management**

ideas around the world. (Gaetani, 2005, pp.41, emphasis added)

Thus, the centrality of the English experience as the primary source of inspiration for the 1995 managerial reform is confirmed, as already stated by its principal architect in Brazil: **“I did not learn managerial reform from the World Bank and Washington; rather, I learned it from London and the British government”** (Bresser-Pereira, 2010, p.197, grifo nosso). In this sense, the reform undertaken by the British would become a key reference for MARE, insofar as—following the initial visits—its senior officials identified the learning potential afforded by the policies and organizational models developed in that country:

Reforms in developing countries may be influenced by actions and strategies adopted by other nations. It is common to import ideas and practices from developed countries, and this strategy is probably driven by the assumption that good practices and effective organizational structures are transferable across countries and societies. (Huque & Zafarullah, 2014, p.17)

In this context, beginning in the mid-1980s, Great Britain formulated and implemented, within the central government, a set of administrative reform measures aimed at streamlining the state apparatus and improving public services, through initiatives involving the transfer and decentralization of public management to agencies that would henceforth operate with substantial flexibility (agencification). Within this framework, particular emphasis is placed on the *Next Steps programme*, whose implementation process began in 1988, lasted seven years, and produced substantial effects³ on the structure of the

³ Upon completion of the implementation of the Next Steps Programme — which was subsequently complemented by other reform initiatives that fall beyond the scope of this brief article — the United Kingdom came to operate with information, systems, and budgets delegated to specific agencies that were institutionally separated from the central bureaucratic organization of the British federal government. From that point onward, nearly three quarters of the federal civil service became allocated across 108 executive agencies, managed under performance contracts whose targets and objectives are publicly available (Jenkins, 1998, p. 213). See also, on the English managerial reform, Bresser-Pereira (1998; 2009).

civil service in England by separating⁴ operational units from the policy-formulating cores of the ministries (Jenkins, 1998, p.206).

This programme played a crucial role in the British managerial reform and consolidated a range of other actions and policies previously undertaken in the country, inaugurating a transformation of the civil service by promoting a structural reorganization grounded in the delegation of authority and the institutionalization of performance contracts. At the core of this model were the executive agencies, whose fundamental principles lay in the assurance of autonomy and flexibility in exchange for a stronger commitment to accountability, expressed in the form of targets and results (Bresser-Pereira, 1998, p. 52-55; 2009, p. 221-224).

Thus, based on the identification of this experiment in the development of effective organizational structures in the United Kingdom — already known to Bresser-Pereira, who recognized the UK as a paradigmatic managerial experience in the public sector (Bresser-Pereira, 2009; 2010)— and following the design and approval of the Plano Diretor (Brasil, 1995), Brazil began to pursue mechanisms for engaging in a process of direct exchange of experiences between the two countries in matters of administrative reform, a partnership that would become essential in supporting the refinement and implementation of the model being proposed in Brazil:

He [Bresser] became very impressed, and he said, “I want to talk to these guys.” And he did it. They came here to talk to Bresser, to do some consulting. As he [Bresser] realized that the United Kingdom was the benchmark case, he went there and asked for help with the British corporations and he got some aid on that. **He set up an agreement with the British Council here. They sent consultants here.** Kate Jenkins, who worked with Margaret Thatcher, came down here to assist him and his team. That’s how the thing had begun. (Martins, 2010, p.3, emphasis added)

Thus, that initial connection, as previously described, inaugurated an important direct contact which would subsequently consolidate a partnership

⁴ This division lies at the very core of the principles of New Public Management (NPM), an administrative doctrine that influenced the formulation of managerial reforms worldwide from the 1980s onward.

that established channels of cooperation, enabling MARE to learn from that reform experience. In this context, a key instrument in making such cooperation possible was the role played by the British Council in promoting and disseminating best practices in public governance:

The British Council, which is primarily the cultural agency of the British government, has also been involved in promoting good government, either under the auspices of the aid ministry or on its own. [...] the British Council organizes conferences and seminars, dispatches experts to help governments rethink their policies on government and provides lecturers for discussions at colleges of public administration. (Jenkins & Plowden, 2006, p.39-40)

On this basis, international cooperation initiatives for the managerial reform in Brazil were subsequently established. About the construction of cooperative links with Great Britain, external assistance from the British government made it possible to transfer know-how and to bring to Brazil senior retired British civil servants⁵ (who would later go on to engage in international consulting activities for governments and multilateral organizations⁶) who had been directly involved in that country's managerial reform, in order to provide technical inputs to MARE.

Among the many visits I made in London in April 1995, the most important was the one to the British government's overseas aid department. We were requesting a consultancy project and, on that day, we presented it to the director of the consulting firm that the British government intended to hire to carry out this work in Brazil. Kate Jenkins was an elegant Englishwoman in her fifties. A senior civil servant, she had held several important positions, the last of which was as coordinator of the Next Steps programme. She subsequently retired and then made herself available to advise Brazil, supported by her colleague —

⁵ In addition to Kate Jenkins's leadership of the consulting team that advised MARE, it is also worth highlighting the role played by her colleague William Plowden, who passed away in 2010: "From 1991, for 15 years, Plowden travelled the world advising worried and confused politicians grappling with the demands of modern government on how to organize the process of policy-making and decision-taking. He returned regularly to Peru, Mexico, Mozambique, Brazil and Russia, but became increasingly perturbed by the failure of the major aid donors to recognize the limitations of what they could do in support of better governance." Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/jul/05/william-plowden-obituary>

⁶ The authors of this book have completed 50 or 60 assignments in some 30 different countries, working for DfID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, the EU, the British Council, OECD, and the Commonwealth Secretariat (JENKINS e PLOWDEN, 2006: p.83).

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another distinguished intellectual and retired civil servant — William Plowden. I immediately established a good relationship with her and with the excellent team of British consultants who worked with us over the following three years. None of them were theorists. They were all practical men and women who had had recent experience with the British managerial reform. They were extremely useful. (Bresser-Pereira, 2010, p.190-191, emphasis added)

Here, the minister underscores the importance of the British assistance, highlighting the leading role of a former English civil servant who had headed a central programme of the British managerial reform and who, already retired, became a consultant and began to interact more regularly with the Brazilian reformers following an initial contact with the country:

The cooperation missions were very important. When I went to England, there was already the idea of assistance — a system of aid that wealthy countries provide to developing countries. So I went there, spoke with them, met Kate Jenkins, a senior official of the British government who had managed the first institution that resulted from the English Managerial Reform, a programme called “Next Steps,” in 1987. In July 1995, Jenkins [in the capacity of a private consultant, since by then she was no longer in government] came with a group of consultants and held a very interesting seminar over two or three days. After that, she began to come regularly to provide consultancy support for the reform in Brazil. (Bresser-Pereira, interview, 2013)

In this way, it becomes clear that MARE's on-site efforts to learn about the British experience, the visits made by the British to participate in seminars and activities in Brazil, and, above all, Minister Bresser-Pereira's personal engagement in building bridges of contact between those former British civil servants and the MARE team were decisive in laying the groundwork for a more structured cooperation programme with clearly defined objectives. These efforts attest to MARE's — and the Cardoso administration's — determination to engage in a deeper and more sustained learning process with the British, as affirmed by two British actors directly involved in this process:

To establish a programme or project, ‘governance’ advisers, or their equivalent, talk in varying degrees of detail and depth to representatives of recipient governments about needs and priorities as seen locally. This activity is normally undertaken by a series of visits from the local or main office. At best there will

be several meetings to discuss proposals. [...] **Some programmes of reform are better structured.** They may have been based on previous in-depth exchanges, such as a series of seminars, visits and discussions which have provided a recipient country with a clear programme of their own and ideas on the advice and support they might need which they have been able to specify in precise terms. Thus, part of the modernization programme in Brazil of the Cardoso administration, during its first term, was based on a decision to set up new federal agencies after extensive investigation of different models. **The Brazilian minister concerned knew exactly what he wanted.** (Jenkins & Plowden, 2006, p.69-70, emphasis added)

A Brazilian civil servant involved in the process with the cooperating partners reports that MARE then began to receive teams led by the British — with Jenkins⁷ at the forefront — and emphasizes that this interaction was fundamentally based on ongoing advisory support grounded in the exchange of experience and know-how, chiefly in the form of training activities and seminars for Bresser-Pereira's team. He notes that there was no financial support from the British side for the projects developed:

No caso do Reino Unido, que a gente recebeu uma equipe maior, que era a Kate Jenkins e uma outra colega dela. Num primeiro momento vieram mais, vieram uns cinco, deram seminários. **E eles apoiaram só nessa parte, com apoio, seminários, uma troca de experiências muito rica.** Mas apoiando mesmo financeiramente não que eu saiba. Eu participei inclusive da negociação, e a ideia era que o apoio fosse realmente de assessoramento, para receber periodicamente a Kate Jenkins e a Karen Caines. (ENTREVISTADO n°1, emphasis added)

In the course of absorbing external experiences and fostering international dialogue through the learning derived from the reform policies implemented in the United Kingdom, it is noteworthy that MARE officials identified fundamental differences between the two cases — for example, between the decision-making and implementation processes of the reform policy in Brazil

⁷ Jenkins was responsible, in England, for the Next Steps Programme. For further details on this programme and on her role in the British reform, see Bresser-Pereira and Spink (1998). In addition to Kate Jenkins, according to interview accounts, another important former English civil servant also took part in the English cooperation missions with MARE: Karen Caines, who played an equally central role in the Next Steps Programme that formed part of the British managerial reform: “[...] Karen Caines was later a principal author of the Next Steps Report who was to join the Efficiency Unit at a critical time, was part of the central team.”

and the modus operandi of the British reform under the determined leadership of Margaret Thatcher. In this sense, from the recognition of essential distinctions between the two contexts — and the consequent need to adapt the new ideas and projects to be implemented in Brazil so as to make them compatible with the constraints and specificities of the Brazilian public administration — one of the core difficulties faced by the MARE team throughout the entire process of designing and implementing the managerial reform also became explicit:

[...] the major difference we perceived in the cooperation programme with the United Kingdom — because Kate [Jenkins] used to tell us how things worked there under Thatcher — was that, when Thatcher took office, she created a very small group, quite similar to what we had [at MARE], headed by an executive, Derek Rayner, who came from the private sector, from a department store. [...] And [at MARE] [...] And [at MARE] there was just a few of us, a tiny group. And [in the United Kingdom] things were simple: they would go to the ministries and say, “Look, this, this and this have to be done.” And they would leave, and Thatcher would call the ministers: “Look, that team that visited you is for real!” In other words, **it had political backing support — it was genuinely endorsed from the top.** (Interviewee no. 1, emphasis added)

Thus, the testimony above clearly illustrates a fundamental difference between the two experiences: in the United Kingdom, the implementation of reform policies was mandatory and relied on the direct engagement of the head of government, whereas in Brazil it depended heavily on persuasion — even within the inner core of political power — and implementation became voluntary in the case of executive agencies and Social Organizations (OSs), which were the projects inspired by the British case. However, the institution in the English system that most resembled the OSs — the *quangos*⁸— differed substantially from them. There was, therefore, no direct equivalent in the English system to the OSs, which constituted the major organizational innovation of the Brazilian reform (Bresser-Pereira, 1998; 2009; 2010).

Accordingly, the cooperation that MARE succeeded in establishing with the British represented a central international dimension of the managerial

⁸ In the MARE–United Kingdom cooperation, the QUANGOs served as an indirect reference for the creation of analogous structures in Brazil — such as Social Organizations (OSs) and executive agencies — albeit adapted to the Brazilian legal-administrative context.

reform, since this support directly contributed to the provision of strategic information on administrative reform supplied by former officials of the British government who, throughout the cooperation process, were closely involved in MARE's day-to-day activities, as becomes particularly evident in the following account:

Cooperation with the United Kingdom was important because it amounted to day-to-day consultancy. Every three months Kate Jenkins was here [in Brasília], bringing people over whenever necessary. She came to Brazil many times. She would come together with Karen Caines — they were almost like members of the MARE team itself — and they were always pointing out possible paths, providing effective guidance to the group, especially the team of the Secretariat for State Reform (SRE). (Interviewee no. 3, emphasis added)

In practical terms, international learning with the British took place, among other areas, specifically regarding the core objective of publicizing major social services (Brasil, 1995) through the creation of Social Organizations (OSs). In this respect, and particularly concerning their implementation in pioneering units, cooperation with the British proved especially relevant: the chief consultant who visited Brazil on several occasions had also been directly involved in the British reform, heading the Next Steps⁹ programme:

With the support and guidance of Kate Jenkins — who assisted us greatly by bringing in the British experience — we began to design an implementation plan for the reform, seeking to give it a managerial orientation, establishing targets, in order to create the executive agencies and the Social Organizations. (Interviewee no. 1)

Given that Social Organizations in Brazil also drew strong inspiration from the QUANGOs¹⁰ implemented in the United Kingdom (Bresser-Pereira, 2009; 2010), the proximity between the models — together with the presence of professionals possessing specific expertise in this field — helped those

⁹ According to Saint-Martin (1998): “The Next Steps initiative was based on ideas developed by three officials working in the European Union (Jenkins, Caines, & Jackson, 1988). One of these officials (K. Jenkins) left the government and moved into management consultancy.

¹⁰ QUANGOs (an acronym for Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations) are organizations within the British public sector that occupy an ambiguous position between the State and civil society. They are funded with public resources yet operate with a certain degree of managerial autonomy, not being fully subordinated to the hierarchical structure of the ministries. They are “quasi-autonomous” because they enjoy managerial freedom vis-à-vis the central government (BRESSER-PEREIRA, 2009).

responsible for the project within MARE to better assess the difficulties involved in implementing it in the Brazilian context, an important factor that introduced greater “realism” and directly contributed to the redefinition of certain parameters on this issue:

Initially, the goals were very ambitious. At the beginning. We were talking about in one or two years to set up around 80 social organizations. When I arrived and saw the difficulties, I said, if we set up half a dozen that's fantastic. That's the new rule. I had a lot of support from the consultants, Kate Jenkins in particular. She was a good friend and adviser. She agreed with me. She was a consultant to the Ministry, and she agreed with me and said “It is more complicated than we thought at the beginning, so we've got to revise this goal. Six or seven, that's OK.” (Martins, 2010, p.9)

Nevertheless, although there was a revision of the objectives regarding the number of Social Organizations (OSs) to be implemented during the period in which MARE was in operation, a civil servant who worked directly on this project and interacted with Jenkins emphasizes that, despite the small number of OSs ultimately included in the targets, there were important advances in the refinement of the underlying concept:

[...] from the U.K: she [Jenkins] was quite prestigious and Bresser was very concerned with what Kate Jenkins was thinking about, the whole process. We worked together very closely and she agreed. So actually we did six—at that time we did three; the other three were created when Bresser was the minister of science and technology. But we succeeded in proving the concept—it works, it can be done. That was a very good thing. (Martins, 2010, p.10)

In sum, a senior MARE official states that the cooperation established with the British also lent greater legitimacy to the Brazilian managerial reform by adding international credibility to the project, since the prestige derived from the success of the British experience served as an important shield in defense of the innovative proposals that, at the time, were met with strong distrust — particularly within the Brazilian federal government:

[...] I believe that MARE's role in working on the fiscal agenda while simultaneously announcing the “new” made it possible for this “new” not to be seen as a kind of poetic discourse detached from the reality we were facing. And, moreover, the very fact of the cooperation with the English — who were above suspicion

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of being irresponsible — also contributed to this. (Interviewee no. 4)

Along these lines, another MARE civil servant affirms that this effort to associate the reform with successful international experiences — which would dispel suspicion — was deliberately pursued by Minister Bresser as a means of giving the Brazilian reform greater visibility and recognition in international forums. According to this account, such efforts eventually led to the inclusion of the Brazilian case in an OECD study on public management:

It is important to bear in mind that, for Bresser, maintaining this international dialogue was crucial — as a matter of recognition, to secure greater international standing. He wanted this international linkage, disseminating the managerial reform within international organizations and academic research communities. He fought for that. I remember working on a report for the OECD that reviewed public management initiatives in member countries, and Brazil was specially invited to contribute a chapter, even though it was not a member of the organization. (INTERVIEWEE no. 2)

Moreover, beyond reinforcing Brazil's international credentials at a moment of major global effervescence surrounding the ideas of New Public Management — when many countries were undertaking managerial reforms (Kettl, 1998)— direct contact with representatives of a country that was more advanced in this field enabled MARE officials to develop a more mature understanding of this international paradigmatic transition in Public Administration. It heightened the team's awareness of the need to undertake the institutional construction of this new model in Brazil, while intellectual interest in the topic grew stronger as a result of the learning derived from British influence:

And then came the team that, at the time, was advising Thatcher in the reform office. The person who had led this process [in the United Kingdom], Kate Jenkins, spent a year, two years working with us. She came to Brazil very frequently, bringing some of that British experience. And it fit perfectly. At first, there was a perception of the insufficiency of the bureaucratic model and very little sense of what this “new” might be. And this “new” begins to be constructed from the identification of those limitations and influences, and then we begin to see greater momentum in the literature and in

international experiences. And we also begin to study all these innovations much more closely. (Interviewee no. 1)

In short, the testimonies of those involved in the MARE–United Kingdom cooperation process make it clear that the British consultants played a key role in that context. They became central actors in the diffusion of the practices and concepts to be adapted in Brazil and were fundamental agents in promoting “policy learning” through the sharing of experience and the exchange of expertise in matters of managerial reform. Furthermore, British support was also essential for training MARE’s own staff in the frameworks of managerial innovation and its challenging implementation — based on voluntary adherence by the pioneering agencies that embraced the reform — while also strengthening the struggle for recognition within government and enhancing the international visibility of the proposals, as Gaetani succinctly observes:

MARE counted on the important institutional support of the British technical cooperation to train their own personnel and to persuade the intermediate managers of the organizations that were candidates to be “converted”. The British involvement was important for three reasons. First, it lent an international imprimatur to MARE’s proposal and paved the way for international recognition. Second, it helped MARE in the permanent cajoling and persuading activities required from MARE’s officials. Third, it empowered Bresser Pereira’s internal struggle for recognition within the inner circle of Cardoso’s government. (2005, p.276)

However, there are also limiting aspects in this process of transferring experiences and policy models that must be acknowledged, since there is a general tendency to offer advice based on “best practices” or successful models developed in one context that do not necessarily make full sense in the new environment in which they are received:

[...] it is becoming increasingly clear that policymakers, at both the national and international levels, **are relying on the advice of consultants, whether individuals or firms, who act as policy experts in the development of new programs, policies and institutional structures.** Their role is particularly important because they tend to offer advice based upon what they regard as the “best practice”, often paying little attention to the particular context in the new political system. (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p.10, emphasis added)

Bearing this in mind, this limitation becomes evident when we examine the following testimony, which highlights the leading role and the high level of trust enjoyed by the British chief consultant within MARE, while explicitly acknowledging her lack of familiarity with the local context of Brazilian public administration — a shortcoming in the policy-learning process:

Without exaggeration, Kate Jenkins almost had an executive role within MARE: she would come every two months, talk with us, give some guidance, and when she returned, she would follow up — she played a leading role in all this. She was very close to us; Bresser held her in very high regard, and so did Ângela — so she more or less had “carte blanche.” She would give guidance and, in a way, functioned almost like a manager. But at times she lacked a fuller understanding of the reality of Brazilian public administration. (Interviewee no. 1)

In this sense, it becomes clear that, in diffusion processes that result in policy learning, it is necessary to take into account the need for adaptation to new contexts — even when the professionals involved in such initiatives enjoy prestige derived from expertise and “best practices” in their respective fields:

These groups of professionals are constantly tracking policies and best practices around the world, which may be used in larger projects. However, in order to make them acceptable to heterogeneous groups, certain kinds of translation and simplification are necessary. These “best practices” are sometimes shared without context, at times producing incomplete and inadequate transfers. (Porto de Olivera & Pal, 2018, p.209)

In this regard, the limitations arising from the differences between the Brazilian and British administrative models become evident. Here, a MARE civil servant makes it clear that British support essentially operated through the absorption of foreign experience, given the substantial differences from Brazilian public administration; cooperation was useful primarily as advisory guidance in dealing with obstacles and in implementing the new institutional models of the managerial reform:

I think our advancement was good in the development of methods and instruments. **Part of this work was performed with the support of international consultants.** During that period, we had an agreement for technical support from the United Kingdom. **This support was mostly for their experience because the specificities of Brazil were quite**

different from those of the UK. We had a discussion of their experiences and consulting support in how to deal with obstacles and implementation. (FERNANDES, 2010a, p. 13, emphasis added)

In this way, it becomes clear that learning from British policies — particularly through exchanges with the consultants — was important for developing a better understanding of methods and techniques for implementing managerial reform projects by means of greater flexibility in the management of public organizations. Nevertheless, as this testimony shows, the role of the British consultancy emerged most clearly in the monitoring of the overall process and in the strategy to be developed by MARE, whereas the more direct execution of the projects was undertaken by pilot units:

For us at MARE, cooperation with the British was very important in terms of strategies for advancing managerial flexibilization. In reality, I think the major contribution came from the pilot projects. And they [the British] gave us a great deal of guidance on what would be necessary to promote flexibilization. Kate [Jenkins] was more involved in follow-up and strategy, but the “what to do” lay much more with the pilot units — both in the OSs and in the executive agencies. They were very interesting people. And they were not officials from the British government at the time; they were consultants, people who had worked on that reform process in the United Kingdom. We had around seven consultants. (Interviewee no. 3, emphasis added)

In short, the testimonies of those involved in the MARE–United Kingdom technical cooperation process show that the British consultants played a central role in that context: they were key actors in the dissemination of the practices and concepts that would be adapted in Brazil and served as essential agents of “policy learning” through the sharing of experiences and the exchange of expertise in matters of managerial reform.

In addition, the interviewees attributed a strategic role to British support in the internal capacity-building of MARE's technical staff, particularly with regard to the assimilation and diffusion of the new managerial approaches underpinning the reform proposal. Given the voluntary nature of adherence on the part of the government bodies involved, such capacity-building was regarded as essential for creating the minimum conditions for implementation.

Therefore, the external support received also operated as a symbolic and political asset: it strengthened the internal legitimacy of the proposals vis-à-vis other branches of the federal government and enhanced their international visibility, lending greater technical substance and institutional acceptance to the Brazilian administrative reform project.

4. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION ON “POLICY LEARNING,” “POLICY DIFFUSION,” AND THE MARE CASE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTERACTIONS

Having concluded the presentation of the Brazilian case — particularly regarding the international cooperation bridges established with the United Kingdom — it is pertinent at this point to mobilize the concepts of policy diffusion and policy learning. Porto de Oliveira and Faria (2017) provide a synthetic overview of the international state of the art in the literature on policy diffusion and its related processes, highlighting the fact that, although policy diffusion is an old phenomenon, it is only in more recent decades — with the deepening of globalization — that the subject has gained greater visibility, alongside the international proliferation of large-scale diffusion experiences.

The authors emphasize that the international literature in political science and policy analysis features a substantial body of work encompassing diverse themes, methods, and research strategies. In Latin America and in Brazil¹¹, however, this remains a comparatively recent field of inquiry, which is one of the reasons why this article also seeks to contribute by positioning itself within this gap through an analysis of the 1995 managerial reform and the unfolding of these processes in their international dimensions.

Different research traditions within this field can be identified in studies on the transfer and diffusion of public policies: *policy transfer*, a perspective more widely explored by Anglo-Saxon authors; *policy diffusion*, an approach

¹¹ The Revista de Administração Pública (RAP), in its volume 52, number 2, published in 2018, presented this debate to the Brazilian context in a fully bilingual special issue dedicated to the topic, featuring articles by leading scholars in the international literature as well as analyses of cases of policy diffusion in Brazil.

more frequently found in North American studies; and *policy circulation*, a framework more commonly used in the French literature and strongly influenced by sociology (Porto de Olivera & Faria, 2017). In any case, this terminological diversity creates confusion among analysts and hinders the establishment of consensus within the field, even though the terms are often employed to denote similar — though not always identical — phenomena:

[...] an important barrier to such an expected development regards the terminological diversity to refer to policy diffusion, which confuses analysts. In fact, sometimes terms such as policy “transfer”, “diffusion” and “circulation” are used as synonyms, but many other times they are employed as hypernyms. They are used to indicate similar phenomena, which are not always identical. (Porto de Olivera & Faria, 2017, p. 30)

Nevertheless, despite this conceptual barrier, given that this topic has been gaining substance in international studies that, directly or indirectly, discuss and analyze processes involving policy transfer and policy diffusion, it becomes essential to establish at least a minimal shared understanding of the core idea underlying these processes of policy diffusion and transfer:

While the terminology and focus often vary, all of these studies are concerned with the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system. (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p.5)

There are similarities between these two modes of interaction in public policy, and the notion of “learning” (lesson-drawing) is clearly closer to the MARE case and to the international cooperation established particularly with Great Britain, since in this instance there was “the use of another country’s experience as a source of policy advice”:

“The policy transfer literature has many similarities with the lesson-drawing literature. The emphasis of the policy transfer literature is on understanding the process by which policies and practices move from exporter to importer jurisdictions, especially the agents of policy transfer and the processes of decision making in the importer jurisdictions. With the lesson-drawing literature (Rose, 1991) the emphasis is to understand ‘the conditions under which policies or practices

operate in exporter jurisdictions and whether and how the conditions which might make them work in a similar way can be created in importer jurisdictions. In the lesson-drawing perspective, 'the prime object is to engage in policy transfer – to use cross-national experience as a source of policy advice.' (Stone, 2001, p. 8).

Along these lines, drawing on a synthesis of the international literature on *policy transfer* and *policy diffusion*, a possible definition is proposed for an important process associated with these phenomena — and one that is of particular relevance to the present analysis — namely, the idea of *policy learning*. In this sense, the notion of “learning” necessarily implies recognition that, within such processes of exchanging experiences, specific modifications take place when, for example, a country seeks to absorb the experiences and lessons of others:

A mechanism whereby countries draw lessons, based on observation and rational assessment of efficacy, from other countries' experiences, and then apply those experiences in their own context, **quite likely with some modification in the process of institutional transplantation**. (Pal, 2012, p.15, emphasis added)

In this regard, by deepening the reflection on the terminology associated with the debate on “policy learning,” Meseguer's (2005, p. 71) study notes that it is possible to identify, in the international literature on policy learning, a long list of meanings attributed to what “learning” is — from which a few synonyms can be inferred. These do not always contribute to conceptual clarity and are often marked by some degree of ambiguity, such as: “social learning (Hall, 1993), political learning (Hecló, 1974), policy-oriented learning (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993), lesson-drawing (Rose, 1991), instrumental learning (May, 1992), and causal and diagnostic learning”.

Along the same lines, according to Rose (1991, p.21-22, emphasis added), lesson-drawing — or “policy learning,” as we shall refer to this term henceforth — may take five distinct forms, namely: copying, when an entire programme is adopted without any kind of differentiation; emulation, when adoption involves some degree of adaptation to new domestic circumstances; hybrids, when a combination of policy elements from two different locations

occurs; synthesis, when elements of policies from three or more different places are combined; or inspiration, when there is “intellectual stimulus” arising from knowledge of features of public policy programmes in different contexts, which are then used to produce a new model.

Specifically with regard to policy learning as inspiration, Rose (1991, p. 7) observes that learning from the experience of others is a process that is inevitably shaped by other factors, such as political power, expert opinion, and the values of policymakers. Thus, “lesson-drawing is instead both a normative and a practical activity. A lesson is an action-oriented conclusion about a programme or programmes in operation elsewhere.” It is important to emphasize, in this context, that the process of policy learning is a voluntary act (Meseguer, 2005; Rose, 1991), distinguishing it from other forms of diffusion or policy transfer that involve elements of coercion or the imposition of conditionalities:

Learning, therefore, is a voluntary act. Governments confronted with the uncertainty of difficult policy decisions may find it relatively simple and inexpensive to gain new information simply by observing the results of particular policies in other countries. **“Good” policies are then adopted only because politicians are persuaded that they are the best, not because they are imposed.** The distinction between learning as a voluntary act and coercive mechanisms of policy diffusion should be, in principle, clear-cut. (Mesenguer, 2005, p.72, emphasis added)

Thus, a learning process in these terms entails the search for a programme or policy that is genuinely effective in the context in which it is to be implemented — that is, it does not involve the uncritical replication or copying of an existing model, but rather the transfer of applicable and context-sensitive knowledge:

A policymaker wants a programme that has a chance of being effective in his or her own country, and **not an exact replica** of a programme whose success elsewhere is no guarantee of successful importation. At the end of the process what is required is not descriptive detail but **knowledge that can be transferred** because it is both generic and applicable. (Rose, 1991, p.20, emphasis added)

In this sense, according to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, p. 12), although virtually anything may be transferred from one political system to another, it is possible to identify eight categories that facilitate the analysis of this process:

“While almost anything can be transferred from one political system to another, depending upon the issue or situation involved, we identify eight different categories: policy goals, policy content, policy instruments, policy programs, institutions, ideologies, ideas and attitudes and negative lessons. These are essentially the same categories as in our earlier work but with minor modifications, the main of which is the distinction between policy (itself sub-divided into policy goals, policy content and policy instruments) and programs. In most conceptions of the policy transfer process, including our original typology, programs and policies are conflated into a single category.

In sum, this specific field of study — which, in fact, constitutes a subarea within the broader domain of public policy research — has been gaining increasing sophistication and incorporating different analytical strategies. Nonetheless, there remains a lack of dialogue and coordination, which has resulted in a proliferation of terminologies and approaches. As emphasized at the beginning of this section, we have sought to delineate some essential definitions in order to align them with the analytical focus of this paper.

From this theoretical standpoint, interaction and policy transfer do not constitute a “total” or rigid process; rather, they may involve a combination of processes and actors operating at different degrees of transfer or diffusion. In the case examined in this article, we argue that there is greater conceptual proximity to the idea of “inspiration” as a specific type of “policy learning,” in accordance with Rose’s (1991) typology — particularly in the context of the technical cooperation established between MARE and Great Britain. In this process, a direct influence emanating from another country’s experience in a particular policy area was clearly observed; however, the concrete outcome was not an exact reproduction or “copy” of the original model, but rather one that necessarily incorporated variations and adaptations to the local context:

Policy transfer is not an all-or-nothing process. While any particular case can involve a combination of processes and agents, there are basically four different gradations, or degrees, of transfer: copying, which involves direct and complete

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transfer; emulation, which involves transfer of the ideas behind the policy or program; combinations, which involve mixtures of several different policies; **and *inspiration, where policy in another jurisdiction may inspire a policy change, but where the final outcome does not actually draw upon the original.*** (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000: p.13, emphasis added)

Therefore, in the case of the development of a new model of Public Management carried out by MARE — one that incorporated organizational arrangements and managerial technologies previously absent in Brazil and that was, in part, based on the observation and learning of a successful international experience — it becomes evident that this relationship constituted a case of direct inspiration, in line with the theoretical definitions discussed above. Essentially, when new policies or projects are implemented in the recipient country, a crucial point must be borne in mind: namely, that when something new is conceived on the basis of external experiences, it is inevitably subjected to adaptation to local structures and interests:

The design, techniques and extent of policy implemented will be **unavoidably shaped by local conditions** of existing constellation of interests, entrenched institutional structures and political culture to the effect that hybridization, synthesis and modification is inevitable. (Stone, 2001, p.35)

At this point, it is essential to understand that the countries from which Minister Bresser and the MARE team sought references to strengthen the Brazilian reform proposal possess specific characteristics in the field of Public Management. For this reason, it is important to highlight the distinct trajectories of Brazil and developed countries regarding managerial reform practices:

“Unlike the Westminster regimes, which learned directly from their own experience and through a certain degree of contagion effects, Brazil sought to conceptualize and implement change in public management policy under the influence of successful international practices.” (Gaetani, 2000, p. 8)

Moreover, the MARE team also came to constitute itself as an epistemic community (Haas, 1992). This feature proved essential in the context of the cooperation established with the United Kingdom, since this group of professionals — characterized by specific technical knowledge and by shared policy ideas and beliefs — served as a key bridge for the cooperation projects

developed within MARE, while simultaneously fostering a strategic connection with other similar epistemic communities abroad:

Lessons can be sought by searching across time and/or across space; the choice depends upon a subjective definition of proximity, **epistemic communities linking experts together**, functional interdependence between governments, and the authority of intergovernmental institutions. (Rose, 1991, p.3, emphasis added)

Finally, it is essential to recognize that, within the context of policy transfer and diffusion, specific groups of actors can be identified as key agents in these processes. In the case under analysis — the cooperation between MARE and Great Britain — we observe that certain actors played a particularly prominent role: former British civil servants who went on to work as international consultants.

In our initial conceptualization we identified nine main categories of political actors engaged in the policy transfer process: elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs and experts, transnational corporations, think tanks, supra-national governmental and nongovernmental institutions and consultants. (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2010, p.10)

Thus, it becomes evident that, in conceiving a proposal for reforming the Brazilian state apparatus, MARE actively mobilized learning derived from the observation of international experiences — with particular emphasis on the British model of managerial reform. This process did not entail the automatic transfer of policies, nor did it rely on formal agreements between states; rather, it was made possible through operational interactions with foreign consultants, especially British ones, who took part directly in the technical formulation of key reform instruments such as management contracts. The formulation of the Brazilian model, systematized in the Plano Diretor da Reforma do Aparelho do Estado (Brasil, 1995), reflected this synthesis between external references and local institutional mediation.

This strategy of institutional learning — catalyzed by exploratory missions and by the presence of international specialists — fostered dialogue with epistemic communities that shared similar managerial frames of reference.

Even in the absence of formal intergovernmental diplomatic arrangements, this exchange contributed to technical and discursive convergence between Brazilian reformers and international networks linked to managerialism, leaving decisive marks on the design of the 1995 reform and positioning Brazil among the developing countries that sought to align their administrative reforms with global parameters of public management oriented toward performance, accountability and efficiency.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article has analyzed, from a theoretical–empirical perspective, selected aspects of the international connections of the 1995 Brazilian managerial reform, with a focus on the technical cooperation established between the Ministry of Administration and State Reform (MARE) and Great Britain. Drawing on a dialogue between specialized literature and empirical evidence, the study sought to understand how specific administrative practices and ideas were incorporated into the Brazilian context, revealing dynamics of learning and selective circulation of public policies within a setting of international technical exchange.

The main contribution of the study lies in offering a specific and original analytical angle on this international dimension of the 1995 managerial reform, highlighting the strategic role of cooperation with British consultants in the design and implementation of organizational innovations in the public sector. Unlike broader and more descriptive approaches, the article delimited its scope to the process of technical cooperation with the United Kingdom, proposing a focused interpretation of the interfaces between actors, ideas, and administrative instruments within the context of MARE.

From a theoretical standpoint, the case examined may be interpreted as a concrete process of policy learning stimulated by external references — in this case, the British experience with executive agencies and management contracts. The study shows that this learning did not occur through simple emulation, but rather through a process of selective and contextualized

diffusion, in which global ideas were reinterpreted and adapted to Brazil's institutional and political conditions in the 1990s. This reinterpretation involved both conceptual appropriations and instrumental adjustments, in line with recent approaches in the policy diffusion literature that emphasize local mediation, translation, and institutional agency.

Based on the evidence analyzed, it is possible to state that the technical cooperation between MARE and the United Kingdom did not constitute a classical process of policy transfer in the sense of mere institutional replication. Instead, the data indicate a case of voluntary learning, conducted in a selective and situated manner and guided by managerial–political affinities. The role played by British consultants, combined with the active disposition of Brazilian reformers to seek external references, reveals a process of strategic internalization of administrative ideas — closer to contemporary approaches that conceive the international circulation of policies as a space of translation, mediation, and context-dependent reinterpretation, rather than as the simple transplantation of ready-made models.

From a methodological point of view, the study relied on primary sources drawn from interviews with former MARE officials, in addition to official documents and specialized literature. The empirical originality of the article lies precisely in the in-depth use of interviews with key actors involved in the formulation of the managerial reform, conducted at a moment conducive to capturing still-vivid memories and strategic perspectives. The articulation of these primary sources with the relevant literature made it possible to access not only the backstage dynamics of international cooperation, but also the meanings attributed by the protagonists themselves to the institutional choices made at the time. Furthermore, this analytical delimitation enabled the reorganization of these data through a new interpretive lens, more closely aligned with the concepts of policy learning and policy diffusion.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the use of texts produced by actors directly involved in the formulation of the reform — such as former minister Bresser-Pereira, his close advisers, and consultants — lends the

empirical material a hybrid character, combining analysis and testimony. Although this condition requires interpretive caution, it also represents a unique analytical opportunity: it allows direct access to the rationalities, dilemmas, and choices that structured the internal decision-making process of the reform during its design and formulation phase. As Miranda (2010) suggests, these are “actor-authors,” whose accounts of their strategies and international engagements at that historical juncture of Brazilian public administration call for methodological prudence, while at the same time offering singular interpretive depth.

In sum, by adopting an analytical approach centered on the circulation of ideas and on institutional learning in an international context, this study has sought to contribute to the advancement of empirical research on administrative reform in Brazil, introducing elements that have been little explored in the national literature. It is hoped that this will open avenues for future investigations into the impacts, limits, and legacies of technical cooperation processes in reformist environments — particularly when mediated by external actors and their respective administrative epistemologies.

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Anexo A - Lista de Entrevistados pelo autor

Nome	Cargo	Data e Local
Ângela Santana	Secretária da Reforma do Estado do MARE	08/08/2018 - Brasília/DF
Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira*	Ministro - MARE	06/12/2013 - São Paulo/SP
Caio Marini Ferreira	Diretor - MARE	26/06/2018 - Belo Horizonte/MG
Ciro Christo Fernandes	Diretor - MARE	07/08/2018 – Brasília/DF
Cláudia Costin	Secretária Executiva do MARE	03/08/2018 - São Paulo/SP

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