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The reform of the Public Administration in Singapore: a model to follow in Italy?

di Benedetto Francesco Ballatore

Sommario

1. Introduction; - 2. The recent history of the Republic of Singapore: an overview; - 3. The institutional framework of Singapore and its political dynamics: the role of the People's Action Party in the development of modern Singapore; - 4. Il progetto di Ricardo Bofill per l'area di Santa Teresa – 5. Some case studies about Singapore's public service improvements: the Housing & Development Board (HDB), the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) and the Singapore's Education System; – 6. Overview of the structural weakness affecting the Italian administrative system; - 7. Key lesson from the Singapore Civil Service and conclusions

1. Introduction

The development of Singapore into a modern industrial economy started since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1959 and was strongly driven by the governments sustained by the People Action Party (PAP). Indeed, Singapore's governments were characterised as heavily involved in every area of the national development, thanks also to a highly competent and least corrupted public administration in the world.

In relation to that, the PAP and its historical leader Lee Kwan Yew understood that both a robust economy and an efficient welfare could be carried out, reforming the public sector towards a level of efficiency comparable to those of the wealthy Western countries (Scandinavian countries, Germany, France and Switzerland).

The continuous upgrading of the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) permitted to build, for example, a robust infrastructure, a high quality public housing system and an excellent education model. Nowadays, the SCS is known for the high level of meritocracy, a strong focus on the integrated strategic planning, a high capacity to support the public and private companies' businesses, lack of corruption, ability to ensure a high level of technical-scientific and humanistic knowledge through an innovative educational system.

On the contrary, many other countries, among which wealthy nations as well, are facing se-

vere challenges regarding the effectiveness of their public-service organizations because the work rules and the promotion schemes reward longevity rather than performance. This produces substantial slashing of the employees' performance and also high levels of endemic corruption, which are often related to high levels of inefficiency.

Most of these problems are present in the Italian public administration (P.A.), which since the end of the 1970s has not been modernized properly despite the high number of reforms carried out in the last thirty-five years. The Italian P.A. suffers from evident dysfunctions and inefficient efforts, due to its inner bureaucratic inertia. The consequence of that is the slash of the Italian economy, a decline well related to the deterioration of the main Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)[1] (rule of law, government effectiveness and control of corruption, closely related to the P.A. efficiency and competence).

However, the improvement of the efficiency and the effectiveness of the public sector receive little attention in the national political debate, making it difficult to sort out a sustained effort to combat corruption, foster adherence to the rule of law and improve the efficiency of the administration in general.

Although Singapore has some distinctive features similar to other countries, in many aspects its past administrative and socio-economics problems resemble (in a smaller scale) those affecting Italy. Of course, not every feature of Singapore's public service is politically feasible for a country like Italy, but there are several elements which could be readily incorporated into the current organization of the Italian P.A.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides some elements of Singapore's modern history. Section 3 illustrates the institutional structure of Singapore and the role of the People Action Party (PAP) in its modernization process. Section 4 describes the SCS organization and the main reforms that improved the quality of the public services. Section 5 provides specific case studies which illustrate the evolution of Singapore's public institutions from the early sixties until nowadays. Section 6 depicts the main features, which afflict the Italian P.A. efficiency. Section 7 examines if some Singapore's attitudinal and institutional reforms can be introduced in the Italian bureaucratic system and conclusions.

2. The recent history of the Republic of Singapore: an overview

Since 1819 Singapore was under the domination of the British East India Company. From 1826 to 1867 Singapore was part of the Straits Settlements, which were governed by the British East India Company. In 1867, the Straits Settlements were made a crown colony by Britain with the appointment of a new governor who was supported by an executive and legislative council. In that period Singapore became an important commercial port because of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and also because steamships became the major form of ocean transport.

In 1948, after the Second World War, Singapore was a component of the Malaya Federation retaining its status of a separate crown colony. During this period, the Communist Party (which was quite powerful in the Malaya Federation) affected negatively the social and economic life of Singapore, with continuous and violent riots. Consequently in 1956 the organi-

[1]WGI are a research dataset summarizing the views on the quality of governance provided by a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries. These data are gathered from a number of survey institutes, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, international organization,. The WGI do not reflect the official views of the World Bank, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent. The WGI are not used by the World Bank Group to allocate resources.

zations suspected to be pro-Communist were banned by the colonial government. In 1953 a British commission recommended partial internal self-government for Singapore, prompting the emergence of several political parties in 1954, including the Labour Front (Lin, 2010).
David Marshall, leader of the pro-independence party Labour Front, won Singapore's first general elections in 1955. Demanding complete self-rule he led a delegation to London but was turned down by the British. He resigned when he returned and was replaced by Lim Yew Hock, whose policies convinced Britain to grant Singapore a full internal self-government for all matters except defence and foreign affairs. In the 1959 election, the PAP won and Singapore became an internally self-governing state with Lee Kuan Yew as first Prime Minister. In 1962, the Singaporean voters approved the PAP's merger plan with Malaya and on September of the 1963 Singapore joined the new Federation of Malaysia.
However, Singapore's position within the federation was turbulent because of the substantial political differences with Malaya concerning the management of the governmental issues (the leadership of Singapore regarded multiracialism and meritocracy as critical principles, while the Malaysian ruling elite favoured affirmative action for the Malay community) and also because Singapore, as a state, did not achieve the economic progress pretended by the PAP's political elite, considering the continuous tensions between the Chinese-dominated Singapore and the Malay-dominated Kuala Lumpur.
In 1965 the Government of Malaysia decided to separate Singapore from the fledgling federation, and so Singapore enhanced the status of sovereign independent nation.

3. The institutional framework of Singapore and its political dynamics: the role of the People's Action Party in the development of modern Singapore

Since its independence Singapore was organized as a parliamentary republic. Its structure was patterned on the British system of parliamentary government: executive power lies with the prime minister and his cabinet who directs and controls the ministries which are accountable to parliament as concerns the action and decisions of their department. Considering its small size, Singapore has only one level of government composed of 15 ministries, 23 government departments and 68 statutory boards.
The government has the responsibility of the budget planning and of the supervision of the majority of the key services; actually, some of these have been delegated to statutory boards[2].
Such institutional framework has been the result of the intensive political action set up during the last forty years performed by the PAP, which since 1959 has had to deal with several problems connected with the need to provide basic education, health, housing, and livelihood to its people[3]. The PAP faced other difficulties caused by the failure of the merger with Malaysia (upon which it has built its initial platform) and by a tense domestic climate: racial tensions, high levels of unemployment, illiteracy and poverty.
Consequently, the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his ministers increased the role of the government institutions with the aim to improve the socio-economic conditions of Singapore (for example in establishing an inclusive growth within the Singapore's population). The majority of the Singapore's government aims were grasped when it left the Malaysian Federation in 1965 to become an independent nation.

[2] Autonomous government agencies qualified to perform specific administrative functions.
[3] SAXENA N.C, *Virtuous Cycles*: *The Singapore Public Service and National Development*, edited by the United Nations Development Programme, 2011.

In fact, the PAP understood that the application of the socialist agenda (within the Malaysian Federation) was not suitable to solve the Singapore's population problems, and adopted a developmental state's[4] government programme which was already successfully applied in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.
Singapore's government in 1965, having cleared its social and economic policy goals, set up its developmental policy and strategic outcomes (which still lead its political choices) as reported below:

1) Effective Government
- Dynamic forward–looking Public Service leadership
- Rule of Law
- Incorruptible public officer
- Customer-centric and consultative government
- Fiscal sustainability and Effective / efficient use of financial resources

2) Robust Social Security
- Financial security
- Good and affordable healthcare
- Affordable quality public housing

3) Sustainable Economic Growth
- Robust engines of growth and macroeconomics stability
- Conducive to business, entrepreneurship and good job opportunities
- Robust infrastructures

4) Secure Nation
- Sovereign and secure Singapore and strong national identity and resilience;
- Preparedness for crisis
- Congenial international business

5) Cohesive Society
- Quality education
- Racial and religious harmony and caring and inclusive society

The developmental agenda was planned by the Singapore's government taking into account an increase of the percentage of employed people (considering that the unemployment rate was estimated at 13.5 %) and a growth of the number of high-quality houses for the population, an improvement of the education and healthcare level and a reduction of the left-wing political organizations strikes that waked the Singapore's economy.
The PAP's government representatives were conscious that the above mentioned aims could be reached by an administration reform (in order to create an autonomous and efficient bureaucracy, with the national economic development as main political objective) and through specific institutional institutes, where the government cooperated with the business sector in order to reach the national economic and social goals.

4. Reforming Singapore's Public Service: the first step for the social and economic growth

Nowadays Singapore's public sector employs almost 120,000 people; among them are the civil servants who work in 15 ministries and the public officers employed in 62 statutory boards. What is normally called the SCS excludes the statutory boards (government-owned enterprises) and the Singapore Armed Forces. Finally, the SCS employs approximately 63,000 staff, or 55% of the overall public sector.
In the Civil Service almost 300 public officers belong to the elite Administrative Service and

[4] Developmental state, or hard state, is a term used by international political economy scholars to refer to the phenomenon of state-led macroeconomic planning in East Asia in the late twentieth century. In this model of capitalism (sometimes referred to as state development capitalism), the state has more independent, or autonomous, political power, as well as more control over the economy. A developmental state has a number of features (among them are the competent state agency and the careful industrial policies), which allow it to play a strategic role in directing the course of a nation's economic and social growth.

hold key leadership positions in government ministries and the major statutory boards as well as to government linked companies. The bureaucratic organization's structure is in line with the parliamentary form of government discussed above, being organized along the Westminster lines as a career service subordinate and loyal to the government (Painter 2004)[5].

The government in 1959 commenced an effective administrative reform process that rationalized the structure and the procedures of the public bureaucracy and aimed to promote organizational effectiveness and attain national development goals. Through this reform, there was a reorganization of the SCS, establishment of new statutory boards and change of the colonial mentality of the civil servants and their insensitivity to the population's needs [6].

In general terms the reform embraced the structural organization of the SCS, the closure of the ineffective statutory boards (and their replacement with more efficient and effective agencies) and the establishment of the Political Study Centre to change civil servants' attitudes.

During time the activities of the Centre comprised of setting up principles and consequential practices which constituted the core of Singapore's public sector reform:

1) strong political will and example of political leaders and public servants in terms of integrity and honesty (through strict adherence to a code of conduct);

2) constant re-inventing of the way the Government does its business in response to external challenges;

3) meritocracy and equal opportunities for all in terms of open and fair recruitment and selection based on educational qualifications and relevant experience;

4) effective performance appraisal;

5) market rates for civil servants;

6) continual learning by doing and through constant review and improvement;

7) determination to make and implement difficult decisions.

In the early 1980s the government introduced significant reforms whose aims were the improvement of the public sector's capability to deliver high quality services and more devolved financial management. They touched the areas of:

a) "*Budget reform*" has been characterised by close inter-ministerial co-operation, the use of constitutional fiscal rules, spending ceilings for ministries (through the so-called *block budget system*) across the board budget extractions (spending cuts), endowment funds, central manpower controls, and continual underspending.

Therefore, under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which must ensure that the public sector is efficient and prudent in using public funds (establishing limits in terms of how the public sector departments must use these funds through caps funding to the ministries at a fixed percentage of GDP), Singapore's public finance management nowadays is characterised by:

- credibility of the budget that is implemented as planned;
- comprehensiveness and transparency of the budget and fiscal risk (fiscal and budget information are accessible to the public);
- policy-based budgeting because the budget is prepared with due regard to the government policy;
- predictability and control in the budget execution, since the budget is implemented in an orderly and predictable manner and there are arrangements for

[5] PAINTER M. (2004). The Politics of Administrative Reform in East and Southeast Asia: From Gridlock to Continuous Self-Improvement?" Governance 17(3): 361–386.

[6] QUAH J. S. T. *Administrative Reform Singapore Style*, International Review of Administrative Sciences, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 1991): 85-100.

the exercise of control and stewardship in the use of public funds;
- adequate records and information are produced, maintained and disseminated to meet decision-making control, management and reporting purposes;
- external scrutiny and audit arrangements for analysis of the public finances.

Any ministerial department that uses less than 95 % of its budget the following year will have it adjusted downwards to better reflect its real needs. MOF also extracts from each department's budget a *productivity dividend* pegged to the national productivity growth rate.
Contributions are pooled to a common fund from which all the agencies can bid for the use of funds, for new worthwhile projects. The ministries can also decide how to spend their operating budgets and move funds between their personnel and other operating costs. In this way, ministries can move funds between their operating and development expenditure.
So, with this approach Singapore in both good and bad times can store relevant surpluses while continuing to invest in high value infrastructure also during these years. Consequently, all departments try to accumulate a budget surplus to have some savings to draw upon in bad years: for example during the unexpected downturn in 2002, the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the recent financial crisis.
b) '*Balanced corporatisation/privatisation and establishment of the statutory boards*' was characterised by a fair privatisation, based on the principles of the developmental state. Consequently the government achieved a progressive devolution of many traditional roles and functions. However, a degree of government control is still maintained through share ownership in the numerous state and quasi-state companies.
A mixture of privatisation, corporatisation, formation of statutory boards and other managerial initiatives has been used as tools to enhance and maintain efficiency of the government organisations. The statutory boards, through partial or full privatization, enjoyed more flexibility in the financial and personnel management, i.e. they are exempt from many of the central management controls which apply to the departments. This aspect increased the operational independence and it is cited as the key-motivating factor for the transformation of the departments into statutory boards[7].
The shift to the client-oriented public administration (attitudinal reform) has been an important step towards a public administration which stands closer to the needs of the citizens by providing more efficient customer-based services, streamlining rules, procedures, red-tape, computerisation and other approaches.
This process initiated in the early 1960s and was targeted to change the colonial mentality of the SCS civil servants. It has been implemented during these years through a two-week part-time training course for junior and senior public officers in order to modify their attitudes and their awareness about the local problems, as well as to improve their problem solving capacity.
The most recent initiative has been the introduction of the Public Service for the 21st century (PS21), a program that aims to create a culture within the Civil Service that welcomes continuous change for greater efficiency and effectiveness.
The three-fold challenge in PS21 can be described as:
- anticipating the future with scenario-based strategic planning;
- fostering positive attitudes among staff towards a continuous change;
- executing change as effectively and efficiently as possible.

[7] BLOONDAL J. R., *Budgeting in Singapore*, Oecd Journal On Budgeting Volume 6 – No. 1, 2006.

Related to that, the SCS is capable of offering a wide range of rigorous training for its employers, which have a training budget to spend on programs provided by the SCS or by private companies. This kind of organization requires a relevant financial investment, considering that the Civil Service College can offer to its employees about 1,000 courses on different subjects (economics, administration, and organizational development).

c) '*Meritocratic reform*' was introduced in the public sector in the early 1960s; in fact the PAP, as reported previously, realized that the colonial civil service had inherited the need of extensive changes if the developmental efforts of the new government were to succeed. Consequently the government commenced a programme of comprehensive reforms concerning the public sector; therefore a number of steps were initiated to sensitize the SCS to the needs of the Singaporeans.

First of all the government initiated a strategy of selective retention and retirement; in other words civil servants with a proven record of competence were retained while those found incompetent were weeded out. While choosing whom to retain, competence was the only consideration. The process resulted in the exit of a large number of non-performing civil servants.

The "meritocratic reform" in the public sector was successful also because the government understood that an employee-centred personnel management philosophy was necessary for the civil service to attract, motivate and retain the best and the brightest in Singapore.

In few years, after the separation from the Malaysia federation and the enhancement of the sovereign independent nation status, the Singapore's government started a pragmatic recruitment policy of high-level candidates who were attracted to join the SCS because of a relevant investment in scholarships and compensation.

To operate in this way, the government set up the Public Service Commission (PSC): the authority for the appointment of officers to the Administrative Service, as well as for the appointment and promotion of officers for senior appointments. This institution was established on 1 January 1951 (as a statutory and independent body to advise the British Governor on matters related to the Civil Service recruitment, appointment and promotion) but came into effect in 1959 when Singapore achieved self – government.

In line with the constitutional reforms for Singapore's self – government, the PSC was reconstituted more as an executive body advising the government on the appointment, dismissal and discipline of the public officers. Nowadays, the PSC still continues to have these tasks trying always to hire the right person on the basis of impartial modalities; this independent body is also responsible for deciding on disciplinary matters, appeals for promotion, and awards of PSC scholarships.

Regarding the latter, in order to attract the best and the brightest the PSC offers very attractive and various scholarships (often these grants allow the outstanding students to attend world-class universities abroad) that are tailored to recruit types of talented and young people with strong academic backgrounds that suit the needs of the public sector. Students who accept the scholarships are "bonded" and obliged to work in the civil service upon graduation for a specified number of years.

During the last thirty years the administrative institutions built their capability to provide high quality services to the populations, applying strict modalities (based only on the principle of meritocracy) for the recruitment and promotion of the public officers. Furthermore, the promotion and ranking of the civil servants is closely related to the qualifications, performance and appraisal.

The civil servants in Singapore are paid at market rates comparable with those of the private sector. This factor plays an important role for the government to attract and retain an appropriate share of national talent. The human resource department, the so-called "Leadership Development Department", has a key role for choosing talents for the civil service leadership positions.

The Singapore's public sector among all the departments adopts an assessment system based on merit and that looks at the employees' current performance and their potentials to reach higher positions, not considering their seniority. Consequently Public officers who rank highly in both performance and potential obtain an accelerated promotion schedule and a higher bonus allocation.

The reform of the public sector has also foreseen elite corps of high-potential employees (as distinct from an elite group of employees who are well connected by virtue of their social class) very similar to some of the best practices of private-sector companies: rigorous regulation in assigning performance grades has as a result a uniform assessment in all the components of the public service.

During the annual appraisal, each officer would be appraised on:

- performance during the past years, where officers are assessed (performance ratings are expressed as *a*, *b*, *c*, *d* or *e*, where *a* is for outstanding performance and *e* is an adverse rating) on their performance relative to their substantive grade; this means that an officer of a higher grade would be measured against a higher standard expected of that grade, as he will have more knowledge or experience than another officer of a lower grade;
- 'Currently Estimated Potential' (CEP), which refers to an estimate of the highest appointment or level of work the officer can handle competently before retirement, and is manifested in the way the officer does his job.

While performance assessment is a good gauge of an individual's current contributions towards achieving the organisational goals, the organisation cannot rely exclusively on past performance as an indicator of an officer's ability to assume different or more senior responsibilities. Potential assessment is therefore essential for distinguishing varying capabilities so as to better develop and deploy employees, and to ensure that officers are not promoted beyond their abilities.

CEP refers to an estimation of the highest appointment or level of work an officer can handle competently before his/her retirement. CEP is assessed considering the ability to look at a problem from higher vantage point with simultaneous attention to relevant details and the so-called "Whole Person Qualities", which embraces more features like emotional intelligence, performance in small groups and feedback from team members.

These kinds of procedures are in contrast to the assessment of most other public services, where performance rankings tend to cluster in the top two grades[8]. However, the CEP is a key determinant of one's promotion schedule; consequently, a civil servant's career-development plan includes training and rotation through a portfolio of topic areas.

After six to eight performance review cycles one's final CEP is relatively fixed, meaning that for example a public administration department has a good idea of the leadership level that the candidate will attain by the age of 45. As the various departments plan their future talent needs they translate those plans into a CEP quota, which gets reviewed each year.

[8] Chua J., KAMENER L., SHANAHAN M., *The Making of a Talent Magnet*, Boston Consulting Group Perspective, 2012.

c) '*Anticorruption reform (Prevention of Corruption Act)*' could be considered as one of the most important reforms carried out by the PAP government. In fact, since Singapore attained self-government in 1959 corruption control has been at the top of the government agenda. When the PAP's government took over from the British, corruption was prevalent and the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance (originally enacted by the British government in 1937) was weak.
Therefore, this regulation was amended and replaced with the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA) in 1960, which was more comprehensive in scope and gave to the government more powers of enforcement, taking into account three pillars:

- effective anti corruption acts (or laws);
- effective anti corruption Agency;
- efficient government administration plus effective adjudication (or punishment).

Since 1960, the Act had undergone numerous amendments to increase the power of investigation of the Corrupt Practices Investigation (CPIB). In fact the CPIB, which was placed under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister's Office, could arrest suspects, search arrested persons, and examine the bank accounts and other assets of civil servants under investigations. The POCA's effectiveness was ensured by the introduction of amendments (in 1963, 1966 and 1981) and new legislation (in 1989) to deal with the unanticipated problems[9].
The Act sought to tackle sources of corruption directly, through a long list of distinctive prescriptions:

- the CPIB can investigate corruption in both the public and private sectors dealing with both the giver and the receiver;
- the CPIB can deal also with cases in the private sector since the beginning, because the government retained as of strategic importance to keep Singapore business environment as clean as possible in order to allow foreign investments in the city – state;
- the introduction of the legal principle of presumption of corruption, when a public officer is found to have received bribes and so, a public officer charged in court has the duty to explain to the court that what he received was not received corruptly; if he fails to explain to the court, he will be presumed to have received the money corruptly and so the prosecutor will be facilitated to bring all the evidence to court;
- the introduction in the POCA also of the principle that an acceptor of a bribe will be considered guilty even if he or she, in fact, had no power, right or opportunity to return a favour to the bribe giver;
- Court's empowerment to order bribe receivers to pay a penalty equal to the amount of bribe received apart from punishment in the form of fines and/or imprisonment terms.
- when a person is found to have committed corruption offence, the principal could recover the amount of the bribe as a civil debt.

At present, over 95 % of corruption cases brought before the court lead to convictions; of all cases, public officers account for only 10 % and the rest are private persons. Furthermore, the courts do not hesitate to mete out deterrent sentences, especially for corrupted public officers who will usually serve custodial sentences and be stripped of their appointments.

[9] J.S.T. QUAH, *Singapore's Experience in Curbing Corruption*, in Arnold J. HEIDENHEIMER, Michael Johnston and Victor LeVine (eds.), Political Corruption: A Handbook. New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1989, Chapter 48, pp. 841-853.

5. Some case studies about Singapore's public service improvements: the Housing & Development Board (HDB), the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) and the Singapore's Education System

One of the most important reorganisation among Singapore's public service was that related to the Singapore's Housing & Development Board (HDB): the public housing authority and a statutory board under the Ministry of National Development.

In the early 1960s there was a relevant housing shortage in Singapore. According to the HDB statistical office, Singaporeans who lived in the slums were almost 550,000 (30 % of the nation's population). Furthermore, there were not private building companies able to build an adequate number of houses that could meet the population's demand.

On the 1st of February of 1960 the HDB took over the Singapore Improvement Trust, being tasked with solving the nation's housing crisis. In less than three years HDB built 21,000 flats and by the 1965, it had built 54,000 flats; finally, within 10 years of its institution, it had solved the housing problem. According to the HDB (2012), nowadays, about 82 % of Singaporeans live in HDB flats.

The institution of a sole agency in charge of public housing enabled more resource planning and allocation, allowing to the HDB to secure land, raw materials and manpower for large-scale construction to optimize results and achieve economies of scale.

After the realization of 54,000 apartment units in five years, the HDB decided to launch an ownership scheme that allowed to the applicants to buy flat by using funds from their national pension; throughout the years the HDB ensured to the Singaporeans a public housing towns characterised by high quality homes and standard living environments. HDB is also engaged in active research to ensure that cost-effectiveness and quality standards were maintained and continually improved upon.

Over the years HDB renewed and upgraded towns; in fact housing estates became self-contained satellite towns with their own schools, health clinic and recreational facilities. In the 1980s, town councils were formed to encourage collective responsibility for managing these estates, whilst in the 1990s the HDB upgraded older flats and built more condominiums for higher-income families (the 'Remaking Our Heartland' Plan, a 20-30 year plan to transform HDB estates and towns into a world-class living environment).

These achievements are paradigmatic about Singapore's capability to develop public policies successfully. For example the HDB through the establishment of *Surbana Corporation*, a new consulting company, operated in Indonesia (in relation to new public housing projects) and in other development projects in 16 Asian and Middle East cities providing consultancy solutions (concerning architecture, engineering, project and construction management, coastal engineering urban planning, building technology).

Singapore's public-housing policies attests that the combination between good executions provided by top talent employees and clever political choices delivered by smart politicians is capable of creating a real virtuous circle that can improve the populations' social life as well as the country's economy.

Since 1959 the Singapore's government launched a series of economic policies to increase and improve the industrialization level of the city-state. Among these was also the restructuring of all port operations including the functions of the *Singapore Harbour Board*, the *Marine Department* and the *Marine Branch* of the *Public Works Department*[10]. This decision origi-

[10] J. S. PILLAI, *Historical assessment of the Port of Singapore Authority and its progression towards a 'High-Tech Port'*, Asia

nated by the government's wishes to have only one authority capable to ensure all the port operations and to eliminate duplications of activities. In the April 1965, was established the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), which operated as a statutory board under the supervision of the Ministry of Information and Communication.
PSA took over the functions, assets and liabilities of the Singapore Harbour Board, the operation of the pilotage services and the functions previously undertaken by the Marine Department (the regulation of the navigation within the limits of the port, the provision of adequate, efficient lighthouses and navigational aids in the territorial waters of Singapore and the promotion of the use, improvement and development of the port).
In February 1996, some of the services of the PSA, the Maritime Department and the National Maritime Board of Singapore were merged to form the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), a statutory board under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT); this change aimed to create a more dynamic and integrated structure.
MPA has responsibility for the regulation of port and shipping services, while PSA manages the container/cargo terminals and other business and commercial services. MPA's key mission is to protect Singapore's strategic maritime interests and promote Singapore as a major port and international maritime centre, through a higher flexibility and autonomy[11].
During the last ten years Singapore topped the list of 48 developed and developing economies in terms of the extent to which port access infrastructure met business requirements. PSA remains the world's biggest container transshipment port, with connections to 700 ports worldwide through more than 300 shipping lines out of Singapore. Furthermore, PSA spends close to $100 million a year on research and development to improve its services quality.
The results of such management modalities is that Singapore's port freight traffic flows have the same trend as that of Shanghai port, which has a greater tradition in this specific economic activity.[12]

After the independence from the British, Singapore's government understood that education would be a strategic factor in the creation of a unified and modern nation with a high quality workforce class able to reach the ambitious economics aims that the PAP leadership had set for Singapore.
Singapore's challenges in its education system have been driven by the following elements:

- a small economy, which must stay open to remain relevant to the world, but then acutely feels the effects of globalisation;
- an economy with no natural resources and which must by necessity develop its own people to their fullest to survive;
- a young immigrant nation with a multiracial, multi-religious make-up that must stay cohesive.

Education strategies and policies adopted from the Singapore's governments have evolved through few phases:
a) 'Survival – Driven' was established during the two decades after the independence in 1965 from Malaysian Federation; the government's

Pacific School of Economics and Government Discussion Paper, n. 19, 2005.
[11] K. TRACE, (1997) *Asean Ports since 1945: Maritime Change and Port Rivalry* in BROEZE, F. (ed) (1997) Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th-20th Centuries, (London: Kegan Paul International), p. 332.

[12] World ranking of freight traffic flows in the world top ten ports, measured in TEU (acronym of twenty-foot equivalent unit, the standard measure of volume transport of ISO containers.) can be found in the World Shipping Council website.

main goal was to survive and to build a nation out of immigrants in an ex – British colony. The PAP leadership thought that education had to build social cohesion and national identity. Facing with low student enrolment and mass unemployment, the government built quickly a high number of schools and equipped all the population with basic skills that made them employable in labour – intensive work.

b) 'Efficiency – Driven' program started when Singapore's economic and social conditions improved. Therefore, the government in the late 1970s started to improve the efficiency of the educational system, considering that drop – out rates were still high despite the enrolment rates. Education was geared to become more efficient and effective through streaming and a standardized curriculum. These initiatives were taken as a way to sort students into classes, which reflected their academic and language aptitudes as demonstrated in examination results. The intention was for brighter students to advance to more challenging and specialised school programmes, while students who were less academically able would have the option of learning trade skills in vocational institutions, rather than drop out of school entirely and enter the workforce with limited skills.

c) 'Ability – Based' and Aspiration Driven' programmes commenced in the late 1990s, when Singapore transited into a knowledge - based economy. Thereby, the government priority was to develop a broader range of skills such as critical thinking and creativity, and to devolve more autonomy to the schools to encourage innovation and cater to a wider variety of interests and aptitudes in the students.

In 2004, the government carried out a new initiative (*Teach Less, Learn More*), by which instruction moved further away from the rote memorization and repetitive tasks to deeper conceptual understanding and problem-based learning. In 2008, the practice of grouping the students into ability-based tracks was abandoned with students organized in three different "bands" in secondary school based on their ultimate educational goal. Although students choose the majority of their classes to be within their bands, they can take classes in other bands depending on their aptitude.

Recently, Singapore introduced new politics to further support teacher-led professional development and work-life balance; furthermore the government founded teachers' training courses for a more holistic approach to education in primary and secondary schools. Finally, the Ministry has rolled out new initiatives dedicated to providing financial aid for students in need, signalling a renewed commitment to educational equality.

It is well known that the quality of the teacher is one of the major determinants of student learning and so, the significant enhancement of Singapore's students' performance is the result of effective policies in teacher recruitment, development and retention.

Throughout these years the Ministry guaranteed quality by providing only one teacher preparation institution in the nation for Singapore's public school: the National Institute for Education (NIE). Therefore, working hand-in-hand with the Ministry, the NIE is capable of providing high standards of preparation and support that are aligned to the policies of the ministry and the needs of the schools.

Each year the Ministry opens as many places in teacher education as needed to meet in future vacancies anticipated by trends in teacher retirement. So students that want to start a career as teachers must be in the top third of their graduating class based on the following issues:

- grades, national examinations;
- the teacher entrance proficiency exam;
- interview process to determine if they have the passion, commitment, values, and communication skills to be good teachers and role model for their students.

Singapore Ministry of Education during the last thirty years was capable of hiring high performing students as teachers through a combination of competitive salaries (at the same level to those of engineers in the civil service), payment of all tuition fees, a monthly wage to undergraduate teaching candidates, the provision of opportunities for individual growth and development.
As for the other areas of the public administration, selectivity operates at every phase of the teachers' careers: the system is always seeking to identify excellence. It starts with the teacher practicum, where candidates can earn distinction and receive a higher entry salary, and continues through the three career tracks: teaching, leadership and content specialist.
Within each is a career ladder based on performance. The annual evaluation determines the size of the annual bonus and whether one moves up the ladder in salary and position. Only the very good teachers can move up to senior teacher positions and only the best get to be master teachers.
Finally, it is important to underline that because teachers appreciate the evaluation system they respect the teachers who move up, and they work to learn from them so they can improve as well.

6. Overview of the structural weakness affecting the Italian administrative system

During the last twenty years the Italian economic and social growth has been strongly hampered by the inefficiency of its Public Administration (P.A.). In a logical governance framework, public administration should act like an 'engine' capable to sustain the economic and financial growth of a country. On the contrary very often the P.A. does not offer any support in terms of services delivered to the citizens and entrepreneurs.
Numerous studies indicate that the Italian public administration is often slow, with level of efficiency and effectiveness that vary significantly across the regions and susceptible to favouritism. Additionally, the excessive bureaucracy and its low efficiency in the management of public funds cause indirectly a constant taxation's increase. These statements are confirmed by the World Governance Indicators[13] (WGI), which suggest that Italy is not a good performer.
Related to the above mentioned features, during the last thirty years the level of corruption is increased considerably because of the infiltration of organised crime in many economic activities where the role of the public administration is sizable. According to the Transparency International (a non-governmental international organization) Italy's accountability principles and integrity mechanisms are poor both at political and administrative level.
The studies carried out on the level of corruption in the Italian public sector indicate that the parliamentary and the government codes of conduct are totally hypothetical and not enforceable. In particular, both in the nineties and in the two thousand years no government has been able to plan an appropriate and effective anti-corruption legislation, in particular regarding the law enforcement.
The law n. 190 of 6 November 2012, the so-called 'anti-corruption law', should be an important step towards a more transparent and efficient public administration. However, although it prevents retaliatory action being taken against whistle blowers and protects their identity (including allowing evidence in court to be

[13] The Worldwide Governance Indicators (*voice and accountability, control of corruption, rule of law, regulatory quality, government effectiveness, policy stability*) are a research dataset summarizing the views on the quality of governance provided by a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries. These data are gathered from a number of survey institutes, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and private sector firms.

given anonymously) there are some weaknesses in what is otherwise a solid framework. For example, while the law may forbid retaliatory action it does not specify what kind of compensation might be due if this provision is violated nor specifies any sanctions against an employer who retaliates[14].

Also, there is no protection for whistle blowers in the private sector, nor for contractors, consultants or former public employees, as the law protects only "public employees".

Since at least the 1990s, eighteen governments tried to introduce measures to improve the public sector's efficiency through a series of legislative reforms. One of the most prominent efforts to improve the P.A public services delivery has been carried out by the Minister Bassanini in the second half of the 1990s (by the approval of a substantial number of laws: law 59/97; law127/97; law 191/98; law 50/99)[15], and by the Minister Brunetta with the Legislative Decree n. 150/2009.

Bassanini laws intended to renovate the P.A. through a holistic approach whose macro-objectives were the reshaping of the State, the modernization of the organisational structures and functions, the innovation of the delivery of public services, the renewal of the culture of public institutions, the reinvention of the mission of public bodies.

The 'Brunetta Reform' added provisions for greater transparency and performance management process simplification as the incentive system was aimed to give equal reward to all managers independently of their performance.

However, despite some appreciable results at the beginning (the reduction in employment size, some liberalizations, partial diffusion of self-certification, the reduction in some agencies, the abolition of the document chasing and the improvement of the performance monitoring) both attempts at reform did not affect the public sector's performances.

The reasons of such partial failure can be identified mainly because of the insufficient financial resources (since the mid 1990s) for incentives, the non proper allocation of power between politics and senior bureaucrats with responsibility of each and transparency on performances, resistance by politicians and public managers to preserve the *status quo*.

In relation to this latter aspect, for example, the improved monitoring of the performance reward system of the 'Brunetta Reform' has reduced but not eliminated the phenomenon whereby there is a tacit agreement between politicians and bureaucrats to set performance standards that are easily reached.

Therefore, one can conclude from the above cited that the conservative behaviour of the ruling class prevents the system from rewarding exceptional efforts[16].

The public administration crumbling has been one of the effects of the law 59/97, which has overturned the traditional criteria by which devolution of the functions and the administrative tasks have been shared by and among the State, the regions and the local government. In 2001 these principles have entered the constitution

[14] OECD: *Integrity review of Italy: Reinforcing Public Sector Integrity, Restoring Trust for Sustainable Growth*, Better Policies Series 2013a.

[15] In particular, Bassanini laws were related to the following aspects: i) administrative 'decentralization' and strengthening of local powers and independence; ii) restructuring of central administration and public agencies (which determined a reduction and reorganization of these institutions) and liberalizations; iii) simplification of laws and procedures (between them the most relevant were self certification; yearly simplification law; simplification unit; regulatory impact analysis); iv) reform of public administration structures also through a digitalization plan (introducing incentives, transparency, separation of politics from administration).

[16] O'BRIEN, P., "*Policy Implementation in Italy: Legislation, Public Administration and the Rule of Law*", OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No. 1064, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k44sssdmgzs-en, 2013.

with the reform of the article 117 of the Italian constitution.

Therefore, a relevant number of matters[17] are subject to a concurring legislation according to which regions may exercise an autonomous legislative power in the respect of the state fundamental principles. The state is required to intervene when the regions' power is lacking or ineffective.

According to a study of the OECD entitled '*Regulatory Reform Italy: Ensuring Regulatory Quality across Levels of Government' and published in 2007*, the relevant degree of fragmentation of public bodies and duplication of responsibilities between the central and local authorities make any policy-making effort and innovative process of change unable to produce relevant improvements. This aspect has a consequential increase in the level of complexity of administrative procedures and burdens due to the proliferation of legal sources (scarcely intelligible from the citizens), in the number and length of the obligations (causing a relevant increase of the quantity, duration and uncertainty of administrative procedures) and finally it causes a waste of public financial resources.

An important problem of the Italian P.A. is the administration of the justice at large, and in particular the critical state of the civil justice. In fact, according to the official data of the Ministry of Justice, in 2012 there were more than six millions of civil cases pending before the Italian courts. The average length of civil proceedings is eight years. Among the countries of Western Europe Italy has the worst performance regarding the length of the judicial proceedings[18].

Also for the civil justice, since the early 1990s several governments announced some important reforms capable to solve the many problems affecting this specific sector of the public administration. However, as the other reforms of the public administration already examined, also in this case the Italian legislator thought things can be improved by changing only the procedural regulations and leaving the environment in which such regulations are supposed to work untouched.

The features described throughout this paragraph show that the political class in Italy up to now made only few steps towards a significant improvement of the public sector. This unsatisfactory situation reflects the strength of the conservative pressures which characterise the Italian ruling class. However, this cultural attitude has been boosted by the lack of political principals.

The forthcoming attempts to reform the Italian P.A. should take into account first of all the possibility to simplify, step by step, the huge amounts of laws that ineffectively regulate the public sector. Afterwards, we retain that several positive elements which characterise Singapore's public administration could be easily in-

[17] The subject matters include the international and EU relations of the Regions, foreign trade, transport and navigation networks along with the promotion of cultural activities, scientific innovation and technological research in support of the productive apparatus and many other sectors and activities. In all areas of their responsibilities, the Regions may conclude agreements with foreign states and/or local authorities of other states, though in the forms established by the State legislation.

[18] According to the official statistics of the European Court of Human Rights, between 1959 and 2010 Italy scored the highest number of violations of the principle according to which an essential component of the right to a fair trial, as elucidated by art. 6.1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, is the 'reasonable length' of judicial proceedings: see the file 'Violation by Article and by Country 1959 – 2010', at < http: //www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/2B783BFF- 39C9-455C-B7C7-F821056BF32A /0/ Tableau _de_ violations_19592010_ENG.pdf>. This explains why 60% of the violation judgments issued against Italy concern the length of proceedings: see 'Statistics for Italy on 1 January 2009', at http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/B21D260B-3559-4FB2-A629-881C66DC3B2F/0/CountryStatistics 01012009.pdf>.

troduced in the Italian P.A. no matter how its current institutions are structured.

7. Key lesson from the Singapore Civil Service and conclusions

In the last twenty years, the ability of the Italian political system to make relevant reforms is very low and so the combination of the Italian policy makers incapacity to provide effective reforms of the public sector, which could ameliorate the living and working conditions of the Italian citizens and entrepreneurs, and the deep economic and financial crisis, might lead towards a period of great social instability especially if the households purchasing power continues to fall.

Time has expired and the next government, replacing the current one (characterised by the same persistent low reform-minded attitude of the former governments), must adopt a series of measures already used for the governance of the Singapore public sector. Among them the most relevant are:

1) Ensure that investments in e-government services are geared towards increasing the users' uptake by systematically linking simplification of procedures with opportunities to carry out administrative practices online.

2) Measure perceptions of burden reduction by business and citizens and use this opportunity to engage in consultations with business and citizens to fine-tune implementation of administrative simplification.

3) Sustain the effort towards a more effective public administration through the systematic use of administrative reviews to balance quality of service delivery and efficient public spending. In fact, the set of reforms launched since 2008 (aimed to enhance public administration productivity (through a string focus on performance) did not affect positively the quality of services delivered to the citizens. Therefore, to scale up reform and ensure that performance based human resources management is delivered for the public administration and the citizens, it is important to rely on high-quality performance indicators that track output and outcomes appropriately and provide important tools to assess the public administration performance[19].

4) Continue moving towards a performance-focused public administration through high-quality indicators that systematically track public administration performance. The construction of a meritocratic environment within the Italian public sector must consider the systematic use of administrative reviews to balance quality of service delivery and efficient public spending, as well as the employment of high quality indicators (reported in the most relevant economic literature) capable to track systematically the public administration performance.

As concerns this aspect we think that a meritocratic process can be implemented also through new policies capable to attract the best universities' graduate students and midcareer transfers. However, this process can be put in place in a very effective way, if it is tightly linked to a substantial reform of the Italian education system, which is characterised also by relevant problems[20].

5) An effective fight against the corruption. This factor is essential to support long-term growth and also restore trust in government, considering that Italian companies and citizens have identified corruption as a key factor that exacerbated the debt crisis.

However, the answers provided by the numerous governments that have succeeded to lead the country have been totally ineffective; also

[19] OECD: *Italy reviving growth and productivity*, Better Policies Series, 2012.

[20] The European House Ambrosetti: *The Italian educational system: six proposals for meeting the emergency*" http://www.ambrosetti.eu/en/management-consulting/scenari-e-strategia/scenarios/case-histories/focus-education/download-education?set_language=en, 2008.

the "Anticorruption Bill" adopted by the Monti's government in 2012, as well as the "Brunetta reform", despite offering some decent legislative provisions, due to the lack of effective penal and administrative sanctions to fight corruption crimes are substantially ineffective to develop supporting mechanisms to further instil a culture of integrity among civil servants.
Therefore, it is possible to sustain that the Singapore's government holistic approach, which adopts at the same time effective acts (laws), effective enforcement, effective adjudication (considering that sure detection and strict enforcement of laws, must be always complemented by effective adjudication), effective integrity risk management system and an efficient reward system related to the public officers performances is the best way to fight effectively corruption levels.
6) Breadth of training is another factor that plays a key role towards an improvement of the public administration performance. In fact, as the top talent in the private sector tends to constantly upgrade his/her skills to adapt to new technologies and new business processes, also the talent in the public sector must follow this type of approach, trying to improve its functional and soft skills. We think that also in a period characterised by a deep financial and economic crisis, through the application of an effective spending-review process the Italian public sector can increase training and variety of courses and adjust personal development plans to highlight where an employee needs to improve his or her knowledge[8].

Of course, also the Singapore public sector has some areas of concern. One of the most relevant is that there is a strong emphasis, as concerns scholarships and academic achievement, to support only the so-called "potential candidates to leadership positions" (candidates who are not excellent in the classroom but possess innate leadership qualities).
However, if on one hand this kind of approach identifies and locks-in since the beginning the designated candidates for senior positions, on the other may discourage other employees who could express their potentialities in the future.
Furthermore, the background of the administrative officer corps is quite homogenous; it means that this aspect can limit the possibility to solve problems through a diversity of perspectives and ideas. The public service recognizes such problems and is currently re-examining the trade-offs of efficiency versus effectiveness, which may lead to more engagement and empathy with public concerns. Civil servants attend new courses in public engagement and communication and they are holding also more sessions with ordinary citizens to understand better their problem and their concerns[8].
As already reported in the introduction, Singapore is characterised by a unique situation, which is evidently very different from the one in Italy in terms of size and political conditions. This last aspect is probably the most notable, considering that Singapore is essentially a stable authoritarian single-party regime (considering that People's Action Party has won control of the Parliament with large majorities in every election since self-governance was secured in 1959), while Italy has been always characterised by a permanent political instability.
Nevertheless, there is one question: can it be possible to foresee that also in Italy a government supported by a robust parliamentary majority (after a decent reform of the electoral law) could be able to implement structural socio-economic changes that the country needs?
In fact, especially in the last four years there is a wide demand from the public opinion to deal with all the problems affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of the Italian administrative and institutional framework. Public opinion pa-

tience towards the Italian politicians is getting thin, and the nowadays-continuous protests must be interpreted as forms of "anti-politics behaviour", which may generate a season of social protests and unrest.

It is evident that the majority of these critical issues are particularly problematic to be faced by this political class that sustained the "technocratic government" and now is supporting the so-called "larghe intese" government. This is, in fact, the same political class that has been ineffective for many years. They proved to be unsuccessful dealing with the nation's decline and in formulating solutions to create growth.

However, in consideration of the seriousness of the problems affecting the country, any political party that will get the power after the next elections, must set up immediately a new agenda for proper reforms with the right priorities, trying to apply the above mentioned best practices.

There are no-excuses, since it is only a matter of political willingness to commence this long trip towards a better country, with grand ambitions, able to return to play an important role in the international arena.