

Report from the International Workshop on the Role of Public Administration in Public Policies' Design & 15th Anniversary of the Central European Public Administration Review

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In April 2018, the Faculty of Administration of the University of Ljubljana organised a two-day international workshop on the role of public administration in public policies' design. The workshop consisted of four parts: three sessions and one round table. In the first session, discussion was about evaluating public administration and public governance. The second session focused on the identification of the key success factors for effective public policies in Slovenia. These sessions were initiated based on the research project "Development of the model for monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects in public sector", known as the ATENA project. The project is co-funded by the Slovenian Research Agency for the period 2016–2019 (no. J5-7557) and led by prof. dr. Mirko Vintar (cf. Mencinger et al., 2017). The third session was motivated by the European research project EUPACK (European Public Administration Country Knowledge), focused on the analysis of public administration characteristics and performance in EU Member States (see Thijs, Hamerschmid & Palaric 2018). A special part of the workshop was devoted to the 15th anniversary of the Central European Public Administration Review. Here, a round table was conducted with the editors-in-chief of established public administration journals from the region, followed by an editors and reviewers recognition awards ceremony. The discussions were all very fruitful, also thanks to the participation of several internationally recognised scholars from the Netherlands, Croatia, Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovenia, as well as around twenty representatives of Slovenian ministries, other administrative authorities and non-governmental organisations. In a dynamic debate that comprehensively covered the evaluation in public policy cycle and the role of public administration and university therein, numerous

issues were discussed. Below is a report on the main topics discussed in the workshop.

The first session of the workshop – **Evaluating Public Administration and Public Governance** – was chaired by prof. dr. Mirko Vintar. The keynote speakers were prof. dr. Michiel de Vries (Radboud University, the Netherlands) and prof. dr. Ivan Koprić (Zagreb University, Croatia). Policies' evaluation was defined as "judging a policy based on specified criteria". Four main challenges in carrying out evaluation in the context of public policies were identified: (i) identification of the right indicators for evaluation, (ii) proving that policies have an effect, (iii) evaluations focused on policy goals rather than side effects, (iv) lack of evaluation due to challenges in measuring policy outcomes and the fact that it is difficult to prove that specific changes have arisen because of a specific public policy (de Vries, 2018). Prof. de Vries also presented a chronological classification of evaluation approaches according to their methodological emphasis: while in the 1970s evaluations were largely based on quasi-experimental design with no control group and were carried out only before and after the implementation of public policies, in the 1980s the focus was more on qualitative research methods (e.g. case studies, document analysis, interviews, observations). In the 1980s, stakeholders' opinions also gained considerable attention in the evaluations and became the centre of evaluations in the 1990s. In this period, policy outcomes became less important and policy effectiveness was frequently measured with satisfaction of the process. Finally, the evaluations taken after 2000 were mainly based on self-evaluations conducted with predefined criteria and checked by site-visit teams (as it is the case in EAPAA accreditations of study programmes, for example). Lately, evaluations have been mostly conducted via (1) meta-evaluations in terms of average effect of an independent factor on a dependent factor as identified in the scholarly literature, and (2) policy screening in terms of which evaluation instruments have been deployed in the past, the subject of evaluation, and how these can be used for knowledge about the policy as a whole. The importance of evaluation culture has also been stressed in terms of the need for inclination towards evaluation-generated knowledge production.

However, as emphasised by prof. Koprić, in many countries (e.g. Turkey, Greece, Croatia) such culture does not exist, even though the EU stimulates its development. Organisations with low evaluation culture may start with simpler approaches to evaluation, using official statistics, record keeping and system monitoring. Knowledge utilisation has been identified as the key success factor in the evaluation. It is a responsibility of both spheres: the politicians and the academia – and the evaluation-related collaboration between these two seems to be a good opportunity for their ongoing collaboration. Prof. Koprić put forward that evaluation should be a core milestone of modern public governance, but we must distinguish between different types of evaluation and evaluation studies. In any case, evaluation shows how scientific research can contribute to the holistic approach, particularly in the CEE and the Balkans, and to a formalistic attitude in the field (cf. Kovač & Bileišis, 2017). He also cited an example of good practice, a comparative study of lo-

cal public services in the EU, published by Palgrave Macmillan (Koprić et al., 2018). This book explains the increasing demand for evaluation as a result of the increasing frequency of reforms to local services and the wish to improve quality and reduce costs of public services, especially at the local (sub-national) level. It encompasses local public and social services and examines the hypothesis that there is a North-West–South-East divide in Europe in terms of the evaluation of local service reforms. Particular attention is devoted to the explanatory function of evaluation. However, the publication of such results is quite challenging since, as researchers, we are ‘forced’ to publish mainly scientific papers, preferably based on models (e.g. structural equation models) which are not the focus of evaluation studies. Both keynote speakers stressed the lack of empirical evaluations. The discussion among the guests and representatives from Slovenian ministries and the civil society highlighted the exchange of good practices. In the discussion, the participants detected, *inter alia*, a paradox between the plethora of existing data and the technical inability to process them, hence their non-use in political and administrative reality for the purpose of empirical based decision-making. Nevertheless, we agreed that procedural issues are important to pursue all phases of the feedback loop, including *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation as well as measures taken upon established dysfunctions and gaps of public policies and legislation in public affairs. In this respect, we need to develop a balanced understanding of the law within public administration and governance, enabling legal certainty yet allowing a necessarily flexible response to up-to-date issues emerging in the society. There is an often reported tension between striving for democracy and rule of law on one hand and efficient PA with rationalised management of resources on the other. However, this dilemma seems artificial since an interdisciplinary approach is inevitable. Hence, legal as well as economic and managerial, organisational, IT related and other measures need to be developed complementarily. Pure normative approaches do not suffice to cope with PA issues systematically and successfully, while the lack of legal considerations affects constitutional democracy and the rule of law.

The following workshop session – **Public administration reforms (PAR) and policymaking capacity** – was motivated by the European research project EUPACK, focused on the analysis of public administration characteristics and performance in the EU Member States. The study presents a comparative overview of the key characteristics and performance of the national administrations in the EU as a first step to better understand the characteristics, functioning and dynamics of change of public administration across the EU Member States. The analysis is based on systematic evidence collected under an EC research project between late 2016 and April 2017. Quantitative and qualitative data map the similarities and differences among the 28 EU Member States with regard to size of government, scope and structure of public administration, key features of the civil service system, the political-administrative context and an indicator-based assessment of government capacity and performance. Presentations were given by three keynote speakers: prof. dr. Gerhard Hammerschmid (Hertie School of Governance, Germany), prof. dr. Juraj Nemec (Matej Bel University Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, and Masaryk

University, Czech Republic), and assist. prof. dr. Iztok Rakar (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia). The objective of the EUPACK project is to ... "enhance the knowledge and understanding of the status of reform dynamics in PA in the EU MSs with a view to better target EU support in this area in the future" (Hammerschmid, 2018). In this regard, the project aims to provide a consistent countries' overview focusing on the characteristics of public administration in the Member States, as well as an insight into the effects and effectiveness of EU and other support in enhancing EU public administration quality. It was quite surprising that the main challenge of the project was to provide a comparative review of PA characteristics in the Member States (e.g. scope and structure of the government, etc.). Namely, it was recognised that there exists a truly high level of heterogeneity between public administrations in the EU countries – in terms of size and composition of public employment, state systems structure, degree of (de-)centralisation, types of civil servants systems, etc. In the very beginning, it was noted that we lack a common definition of the very core concepts, e.g. core public administration, civil servant/public employee, agency, etc. Nevertheless, it was established without a doubt that the Weberian model of governance still dominates in many countries. The analysis of reform approaches in PA explores five dimensions of public institutions in EU countries: transparency and accountability, organisation, policymaking, human resources management, and service delivery. The results reveal that the main drivers of reforms in public administration of the Member States are budget pressures/crisis, and that there is a remarkable influence of the European Commission in certain areas (e.g. digitalisation, administrative burden reduction, one-stop-shops). The project also revealed that reforms were mainly focused on open government/transparency, civil service, e-government, strengthening of coordination/centre of government and merging of agencies or other PA bodies, performance management and administrative burden reduction. New Public Management concepts are still quite attractive in PAR programmes. Unfortunately, most of the reforms so far have been conducted without strategic approach, and only half of the Member States included in their reforms all government levels. In addition, a dominance of incremental approaches, law-based and top-down approaches was identified in substantial PAR in the EU Member States.

Assist. prof. dr. Rakar and prof. dr. Juraj Nemec presented EUPACK reports for Slovenia and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The CEE perspective revealed that even in this group of countries there is a highly heterogenic approach to coordination of administrative reforms in terms of its institutional arrangement. As regards administrative tradition and culture, it was established that in most EU countries (CEE countries in particular, see also Kovač & Bileišis, 2017), public administrations are procedurally-based only, while only in the UK and in the Netherlands clean managerial patterns of operation exist. Slovenia will therefore have to intensify its reforms in the field of e-government and business friendly administrative environment, red tape, HRM and salary systems, as well as regulatory procedures and quality (Rakar, 2018; Virant & Rakar, 2017). In the discussion, the participants agreed that the legal determinants of public administration are important and Slovenia diligently complies

with the European standards in this respect, whereas there is a rather evident implementation gap, for instance with not only formal public consultation and participation in decision-making (cf. Kovač, 2017). Regulatory Impact Analysis is, in this context, a necessary part of good governance, as it pursues cross-cutting principles of administrative law, democratic authority, and efficient public administration. Moreover, public consultation may serve to not only improve the democratic deficit of public administration, but also significantly contribute to a better establishment of the relevant facts and exchange of expertise, which leads to better regulation and better implementation thereof, even though the regulatory process might take more time and effort.

The third session – **Identification of the key success factors for effective public policies** – began with keynote speakers prof. dr. Calin Hintea (Babes Bolyai University, Romania) and assist. prof. dr. Lan Umek together with assist. dr. Žiga Kotnik (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia). Prof. Hintea presented a valuable classification of PAR in terms of motivation and impact. He divided reforms according to motivation into 'must do' and ideologically driven reforms; according to impact, reforms were divided into structural and policy oriented. It was stressed that, in reality, 'must do' policy reforms were prevailing, even though ideologically driven structural reforms were something we should all wish for, but they could practically never be identified outside theory. He also presented four stages of administrative reforms (as identified in the Romanian context): (1) legislative reforms resulting in new forms of organisation and new working procedures, (2) reforms of formal structures and procedures, (3) reforms at the level of public policies, (4) structural reforms resulting in a redefinition of the dimensions of the state and of the prioritised intervention areas. The early stages of the fifth reform phase focus on a managerial approach with two main priorities: quality of service and performance management and measurement. It was established that strategic approach was of crucial importance for PAR (and it was identified in many Romanian local governments, mainly due to the fact that strategic plan represents a requirement in gaining EU funding). Also in this session the need for cooperation between academia and 'real-life' environment was stressed as very important. In this regard, prof. Hintea also presented a case of such cooperation between Babes Bolyai University and Romanian local governments, which proved to be very successful.

Assist. prof. Lan Umek and assist. dr. Žiga Kotnik presented the preliminary results of the ATENA project, which is based on the assumption that "the institutional and administrative aspects of the public policies, programmes, and projects (PPPP) implementation are one of the weakest points of the operation of Slovene government and its public administration". The main part of the ATENA project consists of 22 interviews with senior officials working on 15 public policy areas in Slovenian PA (e.g. spatial planning policy, budgeting policy, labour and social policy, science and research, consumer protection, etc.). The results of the research were acquired in two stages: (1) quantitative analysis of the results (see Mencinger et al., 2017) and (2) qualitative analysis by means of the ATLAS software (in progress). The results of the first stage

revealed “a need for establishing a systemic solution in public policy design, which would merge different authorities’ efforts, epistemic communities, and the public in developing a structural multilevel model for good public governance” (Kotnik et al., 2018).

The final part of the event was dedicated to the **15th anniversary of the Central European Public Administration Review** journal. This part included a round table with editors-in-chief of established regional journals in the field of public administration, i.e. assoc. prof. dr. Polonca Kovač (Central European Public Administration Review), prof. dr. Juraj Nemec (The NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy), prof. dr. Calin Hinteă (Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences) and prof. dr. Ivan Koprić (Croatian and Comparative Public Administration). The round table was opened by assoc. prof. Kovač with a brief overview of the development of the journal since 2003 (initially titled Administration and later renamed to International Public Administration Review) and its main milestones in order to gain higher scientific excellence and audience beyond national borders. Today, the Central European Public Administration Review publishes only original scientific articles in English, mostly on integrative and multidisciplinary research in public administration and governance. The journal mainly covers Central Europe, not only in geographical terms but rather in a contextual sense by supporting administrative reforms in accordance with European principles. According to the editors, the journal’s aims are openness across national and disciplinary boundaries, focus on the specifics and importance of public administration as a societal system and its multilevel governance, and substantive and methodological scientific relevance of selected topics through a strict review process to enable thought-provoking debate and further research. The discussion that followed was indeed interesting since all editors presented their experience in journal management: from procedure, the role of authors, reviewers, editors and publishers, costs and benefits of the journal being indexed by Scopus and SSCI, to unethical practices used by researchers and other challenges faced by editors. A special emphasis was placed on the need for papers contributing to the knowledge transfer between academia and practice and on open access, as well as on English as a contemporary *lingua franca*. The participants also addressed interdisciplinarity and internationalisation of public administration as a scientific discipline.

Prof. Hinteă pointed out that managing a scientific journal is a great responsibility and burden, but there is trade-off in the contribution to society. To this end, however, the activities need to be professionalised, especially with the requirements of indexation (taking into account that the TRAS magazine is one of the few in the region to be SSCI indexed), and a few hundred articles submitted annually. Although, he emphasised, the editorial board should follow the organic growth of the journal and the community more closely than formal acknowledgment to constitute a quality scientific publication. Prof. Koprić considered that the tradition of the scientific journal can be an advantage, but at the same time a burden since certain expectations of external colleagues arise, not necessarily topical for the development of PA nor the

journal, especially within the EU reality. Nonetheless, he presented some solutions in the development of Croatian and Comparative Public Administration for the efficient transfer of knowledge from scholars to practitioners, for example, the parallel publication of scientific articles in English and expert attachments in Croatian or taking interdisciplinary topics beyond national boundaries as a source of quality contributions (for example, migration), firstly as a special conference theme and afterwards a journal topic. Prof. Nemec emphasised that the NISPAcee Journal is the only non-faculty attributed journal. Therefore, it has certain advantages, for example, several comparative analyses and various profiles of authors. On the other hand, this brings problems, such as lack of capacity to support the management of the journal's production and dissemination. He also stressed the concern for the development of authors and reviewers, not only for the benefit of the 'publishing industry'.

Following the round table, the Faculty of Administration Senate's recognition awards for collective effort and results were given to the founding editorial board of today's Central European Public Administration Review: prof. dr. Stanka Setnikar Cankar as editor-in-chief, prof. dr. Janez Grad and prof. dr. Maja Klun as field editors, Marjeta Pečarič as technical editor, and Katarina Puc as language editor (see the cover photo). Moreover, awards were given to the best reviewers, namely prof. dr. Helena Blažič (University of Rijeka, Croatia) and prof. dr. Jacques Ziller (University Padua, Italy), based on their reliability, quality of reviews, and constructive attitude to the journal and authors.

Finally, the workshop participants agreed that public administration, as a key social subsystem, must respond to societal changes proactively and systematically in order to be effective, especially in the conditions of multi-level public governance in the EU. Empirical analyses and comparisons show that Slovenia is exemplary regarding compliance with European principles and development guidelines, but often only in terms of declaratory strategies or regulations. On the other hand, the implementation and evaluation of public policies are often weak due to, *inter alia*, (too) strong and often (too) rapidly changing political influence on public policies design to be run by professional criteria, the lack of public consultation and evidence based decision-making, the lack of cross-sectoral cooperation, almost exclusive focus on regulatory and formal aspects of public administration, etc. Nevertheless, the keynote speakers' presentations, accessible also online, and the debates suggested solutions to make both sectoral and horizontal public policies more effective. Successful approaches – in the framework of research projects and study programmes, as well as consulting and scientific publications – are mainly grounded on the collaboration between university based expertise and administrators in the national, regional and international arena.

The presentations held by keynote speakers are openly accessible at the workshop's web page: <<http://www.fu.uni-lj.si/en/research-and-consulting/research-and-development/conferences/mednarodna-delavnica-o-vlogi-javne-uprave-pri-oblikovanju-javnih-politik/>>.

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