

European Perspectives for Public Administration: EPPA as a Strategic Agenda for EGPA

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August 2016

The PA research community in Europe has changed significantly in the last decades. PA research has become more European. The stable and sustainable growth of EGPA is a clear indication of this. The size of its conferences and the stability of its thematic study groups demonstrate that networks are productive and functioning. The volume of research money at the national and European (FP7) level also has expanded and financed substantial research programmes and networks (COST). It has pushed the quantity and quality of comparative research in the field of PA. Researchers and PhD's have circulated within Europe between research teams. Doctoral PA programmes have professionalized.

The PA community in Europe has grown in the last decades, certainly in some countries. There are many reasons for this. Obviously, in Central and Eastern Europe, the presence of NISPACEE has created a (re-)new(ed) capacity. The PA-teaching networks have become more European with an effort to guarantee exchange, learning, quality control and to promote knowledge transfer across Europe (EAPAA, Erasmus).

There is a need to keep PA 'contemporary' and to stay relevant for the practice of public administration. Contemporary PA is not just PA knowledge produced today and focusing on current developments in the field of public administration and society, it is PA knowledge produced today that is relevant for the future. It is crucial to have a PA knowledge strategy which guarantees its relevance for the future. And there is a need to organise this as an academic community.

Questioning

Several periodic efforts have been organized in the past, mostly in the USA. The Minnowbrook tradition including the major conferences Minnowbrook I (1968), Minnowbrook II (1988), Minnowbrook III (2008) are fine examples of how to reflect upon how to remain relevant for the future, and how to anticipate future developments. On the European side, even when many Americans were involved, the Bielefeld project at the beginning of the 1980s was a landmark initiative. EGPA, on the occasion of its 35th anniversary in 2010 (as a regional group within IIAS which celebrated its 80th anniversary), reflected on the identity of its European PA community (Bouckaert & van de Donk, 2010). Some prominent scholars have also made their own analysis and assessment of the field (Pollitt, 2016).



When these past efforts of 'taking stock' or 'substantial reflections' are analysed, there seems to be a set of common denominators, assumptions and expectations (Bertels, Bouckaert, Jann, 2016):

1. Public Administration research and teaching runs too much behind the actualities; however it should also be in front of the facts, it should not just push realities but also pull realities;
2. Public Administration is too much dominated by one discipline; however, it should be much more taking several disciplines into account and result in an equilibrated approach;
3. Public Administration is thinking too much in causal terms; however, it should also, as a social science, think in teleological terms;
4. Public Administration is often pretending to be disconnected from time and space; however, it should take actively and positively context and culture into account;
5. Public Administration research is still relevant for practice; however, it should anticipate its future relevance for public administration.

European Public Administration vs. Public Administration in Europe

But why European Perspectives? There is a difference between European Public Administration (EPA) and Public Administration in Europe (PAE). It is necessary to distinguish between these two approaches. The one, EPA, takes the contingencies and features of Europe into account. It starts from the European specificities and moves to the general and generic levels. The other (PAE) is about applying general knowledge to the European sphere of public administration. Both approaches invite for comparative research and learning from other practices.

There are specific problems in Europe which need to be addressed, also by European scholars. Studying the functioning of the European Institutions, their policies, and their interactions with the Member-Countries, is one of the most significant topics where European Public Administration needs to increase its relevance and its capacity to be part of the solutions. At the same time, Europe is about an ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity. There are 24 official languages in the European Union. To bring **unity in diversity** in a context of 'requisite variety' becomes an important assignment for Public Administration.

Transformations of public administration systems in Europe is a combination of causality and path-dependency as a push factor, but also and even more of a teleological drive as a pull-factor. Defining this 'telos' should be part of the role of Public Administration to develop possible futures. The European Union moved from a chapter in foreign policy to a chapter in domestic policy and politics. Therefore, Public Administration also needs to move from Public Administration in its separate Member-Countries, to Public Administration in Europe,

to ultimately European Public Administration. This needs the broad umbrella of European Perspectives for Public Administration.

EPPA: Key Perspectives for contemporary European PA

Even though these undertakings offer many inspirations, we are convinced that this discussion needs new inputs, and that we need a distinctively European view. Our basic question is how we, as researchers and teachers will and should deal with the changing role of public administrations and the public sector in Europe. Our aims are to define the role of Public Administration (as an academic undertaking) in the future university and the academic world, to take alternative cultures and futures into account, to take inter- and multidisciplinary seriously, and to strengthen the European voice in the world.

We are therefore pursuing four interrelated questions:

1. Keeping an eye on the disciplines: What can we learn and how can we cooperate across the established disciplinary boundaries, which seem to become ever more imperative and impregnable?
2. Keeping an eye on the future: How can we learn trusting utopias and distrusting dystopias, learning to think beyond short-term problems and solutions, but trying to be as realistic as possible?
3. Keeping an eye around us: How can we take different cultures seriously, avoiding a 'one solution fits all' approach, while at the same time we keep learning from each other?
4. Keeping an eye on practice: What can we teach and how can we help, what are the practical lessons for teaching and research of all this?

The first topic is about re-emphasizing the existing and necessary contributions of economics, law, psychology, political science, history, anthropology, and other relevant disciplines in the field of Public Administration. How can we establish new forms of cooperation and learning, and how can we avoid or at least diminish academic silos and established misunderstandings? The second topic focuses on the fact that academic Public Administration has been for many years very Anglo-Saxon oriented, for example basically ignoring the contributions of public law and different national cultures. How can we enlarge this parochial view? The third topic asks how a special type of 'possible futures' such as utopias and dystopias or scenarios appeal to public administrations and to Public Administration. How should we deal with them in academic teaching and research? Just ignoring them, does not seem to be a very convincing option. The fourth topic is finally about organizing the accumulation of knowledge in Public Administration. How can we strengthen comparative research and teaching and how can we integrate different disciplines and scientific approaches with public administration practices?

EPPA I Initiative - The Potsdam-Leuven-Project (PLP)

The EPPA I initiative is a research programme financed by the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation which granted Geert Bouckaert the Anneliese Maier Research Award to strengthen Public Administration. The project is a collaboration between Potsdam University and KU Leuven and for the period of 2014-2019. Its purpose is to build academic capacity and sustainable results for an academic community within the philosophy of Alexander von Humboldt.

The PLP aims at realizing EPPA within EGPA by organizing a survey, focused seminars, networks, a major conference resulting in a sustainable intellectual programme in Europe for PA.

EPPA-EGPA

Inspired by the 20-yearly American Minnowbrook initiative, EPPA I aims at realizing its European version. From a timing perspective, the sequence could be as follows:

1968/M-I 1988/M-II 2008/M-III 2018/EPPA-I 2028/M-IV 2038/EPPA-II 2048/M-V
2058/EPPA-III

The 20-yearly Minnowbrook initiative in our vision would be alternated and combined with the 20-yearly EPPA initiative, which results in a reflective major initiative every decade. It is the intention for EPPA to 'invite' Minnowbrook to its major meeting to guarantee a TransAtlantic dialogue (TAD) at this high level of strategy. As a consequence, it would be logical and we would be honoured to have an EPPA delegation at the future Minnowbrooks.

'EPPA at EGPA'

To get EPPA started, a survey was organised for EGPA members and EGPA conference participants at the 2015 EGPA Annual Conference in Toulouse, France. This resulted in the base for the development of four pillars ('Disciplines', 'Futures', 'Cultures', and 'Practices') and a sequence of activities within these pillars. Within each pillar, a seminar will be organised, with a follow up and a general communication. A serious effort is made to include PhD students, and young researchers, as the next generation in PA who need to have the ownership of the field itself. During each EGPA conference, PLP/EPPA I will communicate and transfer its findings to the meeting of the study group directors, to the steering committee, and to the conference participants. A website will allow following the progress, the discussion, and the agenda (www.perspectivespa.eu). This website will be linked to the EGPA website. PLP/EPPA will also reach out to NISPACE as a major player in the European field.



‘EPPA of EGPA’

A concluding major meeting in 2018 should launch EPPA as a key project of the EGPA strategic agenda. The organizer of EPPA-I is EGPA, and PLP will financially sponsor EPPA-I. One could think that this EPPA-I meeting has an impact on the EGPA strategy within IIAS.

After the EPPA-I event EGPA becomes ‘owner’ of EPPA and its agenda for the next decades. One way to keep the continuity is to relate study groups for follow-up and to prepare EPPA-II.

References

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