

## **Mission statement**

### **EGPA PERMANENT STUDY GROUP ON PUBLIC POLICY**

#### **Objectives and planning 2010-2012**

##### **General objective**

The overall goal of the EGPA Permanent Study Group on Public Policy is to develop and strengthen the ties between the fields of public administration/public management and political science/public policy. The Study Group aims to provide venues for bringing together scholars within these fields to become better acquainted and establish networks that promote joint research projects and stimulate cross-fertilization in other respects as well. The Study Group is premised on the notion that both fields have something to offer that the other is lacking. While political scientists have tended to focus primarily on macro-level dependent and independent variables in cross-national comparison, the focus of public management scholars have generally been on lower and more operational levels of analysis within a given politico-administrative system. The challenge for comparative studies in general is to integrate and synthesize insights from all relevant levels of analysis. This will lead to empirical, theoretical and methodological advances in both fields.

##### **Public policy as field of study**

Since Lasswell (1951) introduced the 'policy orientation' the field of the study of public policy has grown, both theoretically and institutionally. It has become standard to distinguish between analysis *for* policy and analysis *of* policy. The position of the former in the practice of policy formation, particularly in the departments at the administrative layers of national governments, may have changed when compared to that in the 1960s and 1970s. The latter, however, the academic study of public policy, has given rise to a flourishing branch of social science. It comprises a variety of scholarly themes. Prominent among them are policy formation, as consisting of policy design and decision-making. Related to those are (sub-) themes like policy instruments, bureaucratic politics and political-administrative relations. Also agenda setting and policy implementation, as respectively 'earlier' and 'later' stages in the policy process have become object of extensive study. Policy evaluation seems to have grown into what may be called an industry. Beside each of these separate stages the functions of the 'stages' notion in modelling the policy process as such, have got attention. Policy change, policy adoption and policy transfer also became more or less prominent scholarly themes within the field.

When initiating a Study Group under the general heading of *Public Policy* there is no reason to a priori exclude any of these themes within the field. At the same time the specific character of public policy should be clear. In our view public policy, among the various sorts of activities governing consists of, refers to the part of governing that has to do with contents; substantive direction is involved. While public management has a focus on getting things done, and public administration in its narrow sense on institutions, public policy concerns the content of governing. It is about questions like if and where to build bridges or purchase new aircraft carriers and how to have provided a decent education for all in society. The relevance of such matters in the practice of public administration justifies focused scholarly attention.

## Implementation and public administration

Nowadays it looks as if public administration conceptually has been replaced by *governance* (see Frederickson 2005) and institutionally by *public management*. The days when Schools of Public Policy were founded seem over. This is curious, because the phenomena the term public policy refers to in public life do not seem less important. It must be other factors that may explain that public policy as a field of scholarly inquiry seems less *en vogue* than in the 1960s. Looking in particular at implementation here one could say that, after all, policy implementation is what public administration is all about. Then even more the question becomes relevant why obviously theory and research of policy implementation seem to have assumed different positions on the social science agenda. Two factors, or rather clusters of factors, can be distinguished; one stemming from the practice and one from the study of public administration.

As far as practice is concerned, implementation as the operational part of governing since the 1980s seems to have been defined further away. This can be seen as a direct consequence of New Public Management. In fact, the contracting out of what happens in the black box of implementation has in that ideological movement been a major objective. Therefore authors like Hill and Hupe (2009) speak of a *policy-implementation paradigm*, that they position in the past, although a recent one. The specific set of problems and solutions related with turning public policies into actions – their definition of a paradigm – can be positioned as connected with what they call the age of interventionism (1950s till 1970s). After the age of the market and corporate government (1980s) the authors state that the current times can be characterized as ones of neo-interventionism (1990s till present). Accordingly the prevalent paradigm has changed into one of ‘governance’. Essential feature is that action matters, in a dual way. On the one hand the fact is acknowledged that in the public domain all kinds of actors fulfil public tasks. On the other there is renewed attention for what makes government special.

Looking like this at the relationship between developments in the practice and in the study of public administration, may provide tentative explanations of shifts in academic attention. Also when, secondly, focusing more specifically on academia it seems possible to observe a dynamics in that attention that has a logic of its own. As Moynihan (2008: 489) states: ‘(M)uch of what would once be considered implementation is increasingly subsumed by network research.’ From his content analysis of two academic journals it becomes clear that concepts like networks and governance have got more and subjects like implementation and bureaucracy have got less attention.

And yet, apart from the fact that implementation studies sometimes can be found under other headings and in other journals (Saetren 2005), the question remains what these findings mean. Well-reputed implementation researchers like Laurence J. O’Toole Jr., for instance, have shown shifts in their attention at the personal level. Rather than losing his interest in the substance of the subject, the latter seems to have drawn the consequences from the concluded combination of the ‘too many variables’ problem and the need for more scientific rigour. That, at the same time, the agenda of the study of government permanently shows new themes and central concepts is obvious; see indeed, for example, Moynihan (2008). Younger generations of colleagues have academically grown up in a partly different world, including new institutional embeddings of disciplines and, not in the least, new concepts that seem to be leading. There is no reason to assume that the impact of this dynamics itself the coming years will diminish; only the particular concepts will remain succeeding each other. That leaves

aside the fact, however, that changes in labels are not identical to changes in the empirical phenomena they refer to. As long as people engage in collective endeavours, the study of those will endure, despite the succession of headings for such a study.

### **Theoretical and other issues**

While the field of public policy studies is multi-faceted, the state of knowledge cannot easily be assessed. In *Theories of the Policy Process* Paul Sabatier (2007: 7) has brought together eight theoretical approaches of the policy process. In contrast to the stages model he considers those as ‘more promising theoretical frameworks’. In order to be included in that volume an approach must meet several criteria. Among others it must have been applied and/or empirically tested. For implementation theory and research a contemporary equivalent overview of ‘promising approaches’ seems to be lacking. Nevertheless some theoretical, methodological and conceptual issues can be identified.

One key issue concerns, for instance, the question of the dependent variable. Some authors focus on the implementation process, as part of an encompassing process of policymaking. It refers to administrative action involved in transforming general laws and rules laid down in a policy statutory into administrative practice like e.g. delivering social services to clients. Others want to look at implementation outcomes as the impact a public policy has in society at large. In this example the impact concerns the effects of these services and benefits on the general well-being of clients. In most implementation studies the focus is on policy outputs: the services provided and benefits granted. Assuming a division of labour with evaluation studies it seems wise to give in implementation theory and research primarily attention to explaining variation in policy outputs. If conceived as ‘governmental performance’ then also links become possible with the range of public management studies that have a comparable object (for instance Boyne *et al.*, eds 2006).

A methodological issue that implementation researchers have encountered earlier is the ‘too many variables, too few cases’ problem (Goggin 1999). The top-down/bottom-up debate led to the consensus of the ‘synthesizing’ perspective entailing that many variables are relevant, inviting for theory formation and other forms of enhancing scientific rigour. In fact, this problem still is on the agenda. The Advocacy Coalition Framework and the other sophisticated theoretical approaches mentioned above as ‘more promising’, concern approaches to policy processes overall. Apart from those, many contemporary implementation studies remain being done while having a single case-study character. Attempts towards reducing the number of explanatory variables in an accountable and systematic way have been scarce, and/or do not immediately concern policy implementation; compare the formal model Kenneth Meier and Laurence O’Toole (2007) developed in 1999 and since then have been testing. Research designs in which quantitative and qualitative methods are combined may appear both attractive and challenging to realize. Seeking a balance between the number of variables and the number of cases in any case remains an issue.

### **Focus of the Study Group**

On the basis of substantive considerations like these we draw the conclusion a) that there is a need for an international, in particular European, academic platform on public policy; and b) that among all themes the field of public policy consists of, especially implementation has a specific connection with public administration. With its orientation at the content of governing, policy is to be distinguished from management. The study of public policy does

not coincide with that of public management. At the same time content is to be distinguished from institutions. Therefore the study of public policy is not identical to the study of traditional public administration conceived as the formal organs of government. What the study of implementation and that of public administration share is their attention for what is happening after a bill has become a law. It seems appropriate to institutionalize this shared attention. While the Study Group wants to cover public policy as field of study, *the focus of its activities is particularly on the scholarly theme of implementation and related subthemes*. Although this leaves the possibility open that the Study Group addresses occasionally other (sub) themes, the practical objective is to bring public policy scholars together with a particular interest in the operational parts of policy processes. The Study Group is meant to function as a platform, thus creating an academic network.

As far as levels of scientific ambition are concerned the explanation of variation is important, if possible in a design aimed at comparative research. This goes, however, not in an exclusive way. The Study Group provides the opportunity to discuss a variety of sorts of studies, ranging from case descriptions to formal modelling. What is enhancing the possibility of knowledge accumulation is not as much the aim of developing a singular substantive 'approach', but the fact that the Study Group functions as a meeting place, in a more practical way, while organizing joint scholarly activities. The central message of the EGPA Permanent Study Group on Public Policy is an invitation to participate. We want to invite scholars from all over Europe and beyond, junior and senior, institutionally coming from various disciplines, but having in common an interest in the study of public policy, to join us in shared contributions to the development of theory and research in this field.

### **Study Group activities**

In identifying the tasks of the Study Group differentiating between platform and activities is helpful. As a platform the Study Group is oriented at the field of public policy, with special attention to the scholarly theme of implementation theory and research. In a time perspective of a first period and beyond, this offers the opportunity to put varying subjects on the Group's agenda. Considering the question by what phenomena contemporary researchers of public policy are intrigued and in what they are interested, we propose the following candidates as subjects for activities of the Study Group:

- *Policymaking across national and organizational boundaries*. The impact of political regimes and institutional design on policy performance.
- *Policymaking at the workfloor of government*. The impact of street-level behavior on policy outputs.
- *Theorising on policymaking*. Frameworks, theories, models and methods.

It is obvious that in the range of possible activities organizing a workshop at the yearly EGPA-conference is central. Next to that, it is important to engage in other activities and organize seminars under the EGPA-heading. From that perspective the Study Group as an EGPA-institution may benefit from maintaining and extending good relations with fora in the neighbouring fields. Among them are the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), the European Evaluation Society (EES), and the International Research Society for Public Management (IRSPM).

As far as publication strategy is concerned it is clear that joint publications in the form of special issues of journals and preparing one or two edited volumes are high on the agenda. Creating a website and maintaining a mailing list for the Study Group are relevant to the platform function.

### **About the Study Group convenors**

The Study Group chairs are Peter Hupe and Harald Saetren. Peter Hupe teaches Public Administration at Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. In 2007 he also was Visiting Professor at the Public Management Institute, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium ([hupe@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:hupe@fsw.eur.nl)). Harald Saetren is Professor of Administration and Organization Theory at the University of Bergen, Norway ([Harald.Saetren@aorg.uib.no](mailto:Harald.Saetren@aorg.uib.no)).

Peter Hupe and Harald Saetren, January 18, 2010.

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