

2006 PROGRESS REPORT

Study Group on Governance of Public Sector Organisations.

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1. General objectives of the Study Group and themes within the multi-year planning

The EGPA Study Group on Governance of Public Sector Organizations examines aspects of public sector organizations. Focus is on public sector organizations of different forms (ranging from core governmental units over different kinds of agencies to state-owned companies and governmental foundations and public private partnerships, as well as agencies at supra-governmental level). Central issues under study are the autonomy and control of such organizations, their management, identities, roles, performance and accountability, and their coordination. The EGPA Study Group aims at bringing together scholars in this field to increase cross-fertilization, promote cumulative and joint research, and stimulate exchange on research methods (e.g. advantages of combining survey and case study research). This will lead to empirical, theoretical and methodological advances in the field. Moreover the permanent Study Group has a clear publication strategy for books, special issues and single articles.

Three main fields of study have been discerned in the Multi-Year Programme for the permanent Study Group, which may be considered as sub themes which are not necessarily dealt with in the order that they appear here.

- (1) Autonomy and control of the public sector organizations *in a multi-actor and multi-level setting.*
- (2) Management, culture and performance of the public sector organization and the implications for stakeholders of different organizational forms
- (3) Coordination of public sector organizations in an era of joined-up government and marketization

Please see for the full document: <http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/egpa/org/sg/pgm.htm>

2. Start-up activities of the Study Group in 2006

The Study Group was established in 2006. In order to have a successful start several activities were performed by the three chairs:

- The multi-year programme was agreed upon
- The creation of the new Study Group was made public through existing mailing lists, networks (COBRA and others) and personal contacts of the chairs;
- The website of the Study Group was launched and frequently updated (<http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/egpa/org/>);
- The Study Groups' session at the Milan Conference was prepared by launching a call for papers and distribute it widely through different channels.

3. Milan Conference Topic and Relation to the Multi-year Planning

In the 2006 meeting the Study Group focussed on the study of coordination both between and by public sector organisations. Interorganizational coordination can be predominantly vertical or horizontal and can be achieved by using hierarchical mechanisms, market incentives, contracts, network-like bargaining mechanisms and multi-level governance approaches. One of the questions was if we can see “beyond NPM trajectories” towards a second generation of reforms in which the pendulum is swinging back by rediscovering hierarchy and bureaucracy and bringing the state back in.

Commentaire [s1] : Added second generation of reforms

The title of the call was “The coordination of public sector organizations in the era of joined-up government and marketization”.

The first theme in the call of papers was the *coordination of (quasi-autonomous) public sector organizations* in order to ensure that their activities fit with the broader objectives of government and that they are mutually compatible. In the call of papers we encouraged descriptive and explanatory papers on the following issues, among others:

- What strategies and instruments do governments in different countries use to coordinate (quasi-autonomous) public sector organizations in the context of increased organizational specialization and proliferation? Can we (indeed) observe a reassertation of hierarchical mechanisms, besides market and network-type mechanisms?
- How are the strategies and actions of public sector organizations mutually adjusted by overarching planning instruments, horizontal objectives in performance contracts, joint commissions and other coordination instruments? How is collaboration and integrated service delivery between public sector organizations and other organizations enhanced?

- How does the autonomy and control of the public sector organizations affect the choice of coordination instruments that are deployed and vice versa ?
- What is the effectiveness of hierarchical, market-like and network-like coordination mechanisms and instruments?

Related to our second core theme, we looked for papers on the role of (quasi-autonomous) public sector organizations as coordinators in different sectors and different countries, (as well as) and the influence of their autonomy and control on their ability to coordinate. Some of the themes that could be dealt with were:

- How do public sector organizations coordinate actions of other actors within and across different levels of government, and which instruments do they use? Are there evolutions or differences between policy sectors or tasks?
- How do they function as market regulator, as network manager or as chain manager? To what extent does their coordination role affects their internal structure and capacities? How do they acquire coordinating power?
- To what extent does the public sector organization 'forges' more autonomy and less control by referring to or developing its coordination role?

4. Response to the call for papers of the Milan session.

The response to the call was high, considering the recent establishment of the Study Group. We received 27 abstracts of which we selected 18 for inclusion in the programme based on four criteria:

1. The abstract should relates to topic as set out by the call
2. The structure of the paper should be clear in order to know what we might expect
3. Theoretical foundations
4. Methodological foundations
5. Variety of issues discussed related to the topics in the call. It was envisaged to compose a sample of papers that dealt with the different topics in the call.

The good response to this first call for papers was partly a result of the distribution of the call.

We used four channels intensively

→ our own website

→ existing mailinglists and announcements on websites (like IPMN, Regulation, ASPA, FINT...)

→ existing networks (like COBRA)

→ extensive active prospection of possibly valuable contributions by contacting over 40 individual researchers which are expert in this field.

We clustered the final selected papers in different groups:

- Cluster A. General coordination strategy in countries and in local authorities
- Cluster B. Proliferation and coordination of agencies at the local and regional level
- Cluster C. Coordination in specific policy fields
 - Cluster C1. Coordination in Food Safety and Pharmaceutical policy
 - Cluster C2. Coordination in aid administration / development aid Coordination in transport sector
 - Cluster C3. Coordination in . health, social and welfare sector
- Cluster D. Coordination and cooperation at the grass-root level

5. Evaluation of our Study Group' sessions in Milan

- The overall evaluation of the Study Group is positive. Both the papers, presentations, discussant comments and the general discussions were of a good quality and raised many interesting issues for further research.

- The presentation was set to be ten minutes; this is short, but leaves room for discussion.

- We appointed a discussant for each cluster of papers. The discussant was asked to comment on the papers individually, but also to raise more general questions, relevant to all the papers in the cluster, in order to stimulate the discussion with the paper-presenters and the other participants. We tried to group similar papers in a cluster, in order to have in depth questions. This approach worked well.

- We had about half an hour time for each paper. All the presentations were given after one another, with the discussant giving his comments and a general discussion afterwards. 18 papers seems to be an appropriate quantity to deal with during a conference session and allows for individual feedback to the paper-presenters as well as for more general conceptual and theoretical discussions.

- The quality of the papers in general was good to very good and related to the planning document. Four papers were selected by the chairs and submitted for review to a journal with the aim of a specialised symposium on public sector coordination.

- The scope of the papers was often broader than mere coordination, but overall there was a good link with the core subjects of specialization and coordination. That is an indication that the rather focussed call for papers was well-received and well-followed.

- The participants were a mix of young and senior researchers. The Study Group was able to get papers from a number of well-known researchers which are highly ranked in the field of public administration.
- The number of participants (about 25) was directly related to the number of papers (18). Attendance by other persons, besides the involved authors, and by practitioners was limited. Increasing the number of participants and more specifically practitioners will be an aim for the next conference sessions to come. But above all, our main aim besides expansion is to foster some continuity with respect to the participating researchers, in order to enhance cumulative research and discussions. The fact that the Study Group has a strong link with an existing international network on public sector research (COBRA) is beneficial to that purpose.

6. Study Group' publication strategy after Milan

The chairs have selected four papers for submission to the *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, with the hope to publish a special symposium. We have opted for to opt for publication of a selection of papers in a journal, rather than composing an edited book for two reasons. First, not all the papers were immediately publishable. Moreover, a rather quick publication through a journal symposium will enhance the visibility of the Study Group.

In the next years, we will continue to work on special issues and edited books. The permanent Study Group has through its link with the COBRA network the possibility to publish books in a book series on public sector organization with Edward Elgar, after approval by the series-editors Guy Peters and Geert Bouckaert. One idea is to assemble different affiliated papers through the subsequent conference sessions and bring them together in an edited book.

7. Strengthening networks of researchers

It is expected that the Study Group will benefit largely from the recently approved COST Action IS0601 "Comparative Research into Current Trends in Public Sector Organization – CRIPO". This Cost-Action was applied for by the Public Management Institute (Prof. Geert Bouckaert) and associated European research teams (including the three chairs of the Study Group) in order to stimulate and finance networking of European researchers on Public Sector Organization (with the focus on issues like autonomy, control, coordination and performance). It is the aim of the chairs to use the EGPA Study Group as a permanent open platform to discuss research results of this network and confront it with other, including non-European, research.

8. Planned activities for 2007 and further years

In 2007 we plan several activities:

- Updating and strengthening the website of the Study Group;
- Creating an mailing-list, related to the Study Group
- Preparing the 2007 conference session, by launching the call-for-papers of the 2007 conference through the website, through EGPA channels, through existing mailing-lists and through extensive personal contacts and mailing.
- Strengthening the links of the Study Group with European and international networks of researchers on public sector organization and organization theory in general.

The 2007 session theme will elaborate further on the themes, outlined in our multi-year programme, and, at the same time, take further last years' theme.