



## IIAS CONFERENCE, HELSINKI, JULY 2009

### REPORT OF THE RAPPORTEURS

#### Rapporteurs' Team

Professor Christopher Pollitt:  
Rapporteur General

Professor Turo Virtanen:  
Subtheme 1: 'The changing nation: citizens, visitors, neighbours'

Dr Dele Olowu:  
Subtheme 2: 'Exemplifying good governance: the future of public service and democracy'

Dr Christina Andrews:  
Subtheme 3: 'Public money: whole of government budgeting and accounting'

#### Process

The IIAS originally received 115 abstracts, proposing papers. The second subtheme (Exemplifying good governance) proved easily the most popular, attracting roughly 60% of the proposals. The first (Nation-building) attracted about 15%, the third (Public money) about 25%.

Rapporteurs' comments were then sent to all authors of abstracts, suggesting possible improvements. Authors accordingly submitted revised abstracts, which were again assessed and commented upon by the rapporteurs. Some authors fell out during these stages, and some were rejected (because their revised abstracts did not meet the conference criteria). We finally accepted roughly 80 abstracts for development into full papers, although as usual some of these fell out (for personal or professional reasons) between acceptance and the conference itself. An even higher percentage of these pertained to subtheme 2 (although unfortunately quite a few of these proposers eventually could not attend the conference)

These papers were very varied indeed – some wide and philosophical, some local case studies; some highly quantitative and some entirely qualitative. Paper givers came from countries all over the world. The rapporteurs nevertheless attempted to draw together some broad themes in their report in the plenary session at the end of the conference.



Some papers were lost, most probably because the global economic crisis is already impacting on institutional conference budgets, so there were a few late withdrawals.

### Quality and quantity

Both quality and quantity appeared to be somewhat better than at the previous (Ankara) conference. Perhaps a dozen or so of the papers were of high scientific quality, and many more were perfectly adequate. However, there is still a quality problem at IIAS conferences. They do not yet generate anywhere near as many high quality papers as, say, EGPA conferences, or those of the International Research Seminar in Public Management (IRSPM), or the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR – which has study groups on public policy and management).

At Helsinki, this weakness comprised several elements:

1. Too large a 'tail' of papers that were just generally weak. Typically, these lack any sense of research focus, of scientific methods of enquiry, or of a critical attitude to evidence. Some of them are just general, context-free argument without any real supporting evidence at all. The good news, however, is that this 'tail' seemed smaller in Helsinki than it had been in either Abu Dhabi or Ankara.
2. Too many papers that, even if they are scholarly, do not fully conform to the terms of reference of the conference. For example, hardly any of the papers submitted to subtheme 3 actually addressed 'whole of government' issues, although it was the headline element in the subtheme. And in the first subtheme there were few contributions that dealt centrally with 'visitors and neighbours'.
3. There are still a few papers which are essentially uncritical descriptions of government policies – 'laundry lists' of measures passed. There is little point travelling all the way to an international conference to listen to such material – one could simply look at the relevant government's website.
4. There is a shortage of papers which are genuinely comparative, or which focus explicitly on international issues – although this should be an IIAS forte.

In the plenary meetings it was also noticeable that the great majority of conference attendees were men over the age of 50. The implication is that IIAS needs to reach out more vigorously to women and to younger people. If a more varied attendance could be attained much of the quality problem with the papers would probably solve itself. One idea (which has been successful for some other international organizations) would be to have a special workshop for Ph.D students, who would be charged a reduced rate. However, such workshops would need careful organization and experienced leadership.

There is also the perennial issue of attendance from developing countries. IIAS Helsinki would have been a very expensive proposition to many scholars in these countries. IIAS might like to consider organizing focused, smaller scale events at centres in the developing world. These too, of course would need careful planning and sensitive leadership.



Some emerging themes

For the reasons indicated above, it is very difficult to draw out general lessons or themes from such a diverse set of papers. Nevertheless, the rapporteurs selected certain points which seemed to them to be of particular importance. These included the following:

*Subtheme 1: 'The changing nation: citizens, visitors, neighbours'*

It is possible to present the concerns of many (if not all) the papers in this subtheme in a schematic form:

<b>Our nation/institution is being built...</b>	<b>WHERE?</b>	<b>WHERE?</b>	<b>WHERE?</b>
<b>BY WHOM?</b>	Inside (at home)	Outside (abroad)	From above
By us alone	1	2	3
By us, with them	4	5	6
By them, alone	7	8	9
By them, with us	10	11	12

Different cells in this matrix have different values. A 'progressive' position might be to favour cells 4, 5 and 6 as the best case scenario. A strong nationalist, however, might favour only cell 1. Most of us would probably resist cell 7. Some international aid projects fail because from the perspective of the recipient country, they claim to be cell 4, but end up as effectively cell 7. We can apply this matrix to many international problems – Kosovo, Israel/Palestine, Iraq, and so on. But it is not only these 'flashpoints' where such an analysis may be applied. We can also think of much more routine administrative and organizational issues, such as the regulation of financial institutions, European identity cards, World Bank conditionalities, international observers attending elections, international passport regulations, the control of infectious diseases and so on. We live in an age where there is a rapidly emerging Global Administrative Space (GAS). Increasing internationalization includes the emergence, on cultural borders, of communities that cross national borders. These are new challenges for institution building, as adequate correspondence between identities and institutions is required if problems of trust and accountability are to be manageable. And they are even more important when one considers the design of the new international institutions needed for GAS.

These dynamics urgently need impartial scientific study and analysis.

*Subtheme 2: 'Exemplifying good governance: the future of public service and democracy'*

A number of papers addressed (in different ways and different countries) the now well-publicized limitations of a pure 'New Public Management' (NPM) approach. Privatisation, downsizing the state apparatus and contracting out major public services can only work well



in contexts where sophisticated skills are available to the public service (strategic co-ordination, contract management) and corruption is low. In many parts of the world these conditions do not apply.

Meanwhile the issue of basic, long term reform of the public service is one that many elected politicians either avoid or do not adequately understand. Even when promising programmes are launched, failures at the implementation stage are not unusual. The question of how constructively to engage politicians in such institutional reforms was emergent in a number of papers and was also a central feature of the Braibant Lecture by Mr Derry Ormond. Rebuilding the human capital of the public services was also a core theme in the presentation concerning the new book Winning the needed change: saving our planet earth: a global public service, edited by Ignacio Pichardo Pagaza and Demetrios Argiades. Some papers also focused on the role of international organizations such as the EU and the World Bank in shaping public service reforms. At the same time other papers emphasized the desirability of developing countries building their own, independent capacity for managing policies and reforms.

At the level of measurement and technique it was clear that narrow measurement of efficiency alone was problematic. Issues of ultimate effectiveness, and also of equity, needed to be part of measurement and reporting systems. Cross-sectoral co-ordination was increasingly necessary, but still very difficult to achieve in administrative systems where both civil service hierarchies and political responsibilities were divided into vertical sectors. At the same time several papers explored issues of performance, trust and participation, advancing the argument that citizens are more likely to trust and co-operate with programmes and projects in which they feel they have had, or can have, a voice.

### *Subtheme 3: 'Public money: whole of government budgeting and accounting'*

A range of papers showed that there is still much to be done in subjecting public expenditures to proper democratic procedures that will ensure transparency and, it is hoped, consequent legitimacy. The challenges of achieving transparent procedures and adequate control by the elected legislature are particularly acute in developing countries, several of which were represented among the paper-givers.

Financial sustainability is naturally a prominent topic at this time. New sources of revenue may need to be explored, and traditional sources may require tighter management to minimize 'leakage' and tax avoidance.

Budgeting and accounting have always depended on particular techniques of calculation, assessment and presentation. These have undergone substantial changes in the past decade or so, although the international and sectoral spread of new techniques (such as whole of government accounting, programme budgeting etc) has been very uneven. One interesting development has been the combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques,



as in a Dutch paper that combined statistical analysis of performance with case studies of particular contexts and organizations.

### *General overview*

It emerged from several of the key presentations and papers that buildings *nations* was perhaps a misnomer. Nations usually emerge over long time periods, from a range of influences and accidents. They are not *designed* and, indeed, it is hard to imagine how a government could formulate and implement such a process.

What the public authorities can do, however, is to build, or help to build specific *institutions*. And those institutions may then play vital roles in clarifying, sustaining or re-shaping the sense of national identity – of ‘who we are’. Major public services and regulatory bodies become, in effect, part of our identities, just like the landscape and the weather. It matters very much to our collective identity whether we perceive our major public institutions as fair or unfair, clean or corrupt, reliable or unreliable, responsive or rigid.

However, the nation state is no longer the only ‘site’ where these relationships and attitudes are formed. Increasingly, individuals experience and practice forms of multi-level and sometimes even multi-national citizenship. International organizations directly and indirectly affect more and more of our lives (The EU, NATO, the World Bank, the IMF, the UN). What is more, public purposes and programmes are sometimes entrusted to international non-governmental bodies (Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, International Red Cross, World Wildlife Fund). More and more of us travel internationally, for work or social reasons, and more and more of us have family members in other countries, or ourselves may spend parts of our careers outside our own nation state.

In addition, many of the most pressing contemporary problems are self-evidently international rather than national. Climate change, terrorism, crime, migration, pandemics, and several other issues fall into this category.

The implication is that we need to think of building institutions that can cope with this more internationalized, multi-level world. This is a huge challenge, not merely because many political leaders are reluctant to risk much political capital on international institutional reform (Braibant lecture) but also because the academic world has scarcely begun to research these issues. At the moment therefore, one could say we are low on political motivation and weak in our knowledge of the design principles and implementation problems. The most optimistic aspect of the Helsinki conference, perhaps, was that, here and there, a number of presenters made a bold start on tackling these issues. This is certainly a continuing agenda for the IIAS.

Christopher Pollitt