



## Development of Public Administration and its Research in India through the Lenses of Content Analysis of the International Public Administration Review

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**ABSTRACT:** The development of public administration (PA) is a worldwide topic of research, considering its importance in resolving governance issues in contemporary society. Consequently, the question of PA as a scientific discipline arises at both national and broader levels. In order to explore the state of affairs in PA trends in India and its regional context, an analysis was

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conducted involving 78 papers published in the leading Slovenian scientific journal – the International Public Administration Review – between 2011 and 2014. Content analysis as a method applied in the research is a widely recognized approach in social sciences and in the field of PA as well. Taking into account the respective analyses of the papers in terms of predominating discipline and mainstream topics, affiliation and collaboration of authors, language, methods of research and other criteria, we examined three main guidelines of editorial policy, namely the journal’s interdisciplinary, international and practical orientation. The results reveal that PA in India is rather multidisciplinary, with a prevailing role of management (HRM in particular), law and economics (the latter even mostly monodisciplinary). International and practical aspects, on the other hand, still offer some room for improvement. In sum, to support PA’s progress and its disciplinary evolution in line with global trends and the IPAR mission, a systematic interdisciplinary and allEuropean approach in future theory and practice is inevitable.

**Introduction:** Public administration (hereinafter: PA) is an inevitable part of contemporary society. However, its role is constantly changing as a result of the redefined functions and tasks of the state and authorities in relation to citizens, businesses, non-governmental organizations and other members of the society. Despite the differences in PA in certain times and places, a significant level of convergence is observed in all public administration dimensions (more in Schuppert, 2000; Peters & Pierre, 2005; Bevir, 2011; Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot, 2015; pp. 9, 37, etc.), in particular as a consequence of the impact of the European Union (hereinafter: EU). On the other hand, individual countries and more so regions, such as Eastern Europe (hereinafter: EE), still preserve their own characteristics and peculiarities. An analogy to the vague definition of PA is detected in PA research. Even the long-standing issue of whether there



is an autonomous scientific discipline of PA or “administrative science” (in German: Verwaltungswissenschaft) or whether PA phenomena can be explored solely in a multidisciplinary way through PA’s “mother disciplines”, is still open.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, taking India as a country at the crossroads of the Central European and transitional Eastern European traditions, the question is about the relation between PA and (administrative) law (for more cf. Kovač, 2013b). In order to verify the state of PA and its research in India in the above emphasized aspects, we designed a study based on the universally acknowledged method of content analysis of papers published in the International Public Administration Review (hereinafter: IPAR).<sup>3</sup> The IPAR has been issued since 2003 and is presently the leading Slovenian PA journal.<sup>4</sup> The IPAR incorporates multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary issues related to PA and tries to be as strongly internationally oriented as possible. Finally, the IPAR strives to be a medium for the transfer of theory into PA practice. The three characteristics, i.e. (1) interdisciplinary, (2) international and (3) practical orientation, are emphasized consistently by the journal’s title, its editorial policy, and the chief editor’s introductory notes.

First, the interdisciplinary approach is indicated by stressing the scientific nature of the journal for the PA field, in particular by emphasizing that it publishes articles “from various fields”, while a “major competitive advantage of the journal” lies in its interdisciplinary nature “that brings together experts from the fields of economics, informatics, organization, management and administrative-legal sciences”. In this part it is clear from the editorial guidelines that the editorial board, authors and reviewers have to be aware that PA (or public sector) is an interdisciplinary field since it has a decisive influence on the quality of life of the citizens: “It is therefore necessary that when compiling the journal we take into account the interdisciplinarity of the public sector and that the published articles show the administrative-legal, economic, political science, sociological, information, organizational and other aspects of its operation.”

Second, the IPAR has had an international editorial board since its beginnings and supports the inclusion of foreign authors and comparative papers that, as scientific papers, are published obligatorily in English or in Slovenian and English (while expert or the so-called professional papers can be in Slovenian only). As explicitly put forward by the chief editor: “IPAR should become a part of a system that enables a comparison not only between the different organisations that provide public sector services within individual countries, but also between the member states of the EU and the rest of the world.”

Third, the IPAR’s aim is to bridge theory and practice



by enabling academia to convey their research results of “key public administration development trends in India and throughout the globe” to PA practitioners. Simultaneously, the IPAR opens its publishing space for the latter, namely civil servants, by publishing professional and expert articles and by “informing about important events, consultations, meetings and publications related to public administration”. Holistically for all three key dimensions, as put directly in the editorial policy: “The mission of the IPAR is to contribute to the development of theory and practice in the field of public administration science and related disciplines, and to the advancement and upholding of high professional and expertise standards of all public administration employees.”

**Development of PA in India :** The Slovenian PA is characterized by several elements, also related to the fact that India has been a small but autonomous and independent state since 1991 and a full member of the EU since 2004.<sup>6</sup> After gaining independence in 1991, India immediately started to build a democratic society founded on market mechanisms; with PA modernization associated with (cf. more in Peters & Pierre, 2005, Dunn, Staronova, & Pushkarev, 2006; for India in Godec, 1993; Virant, 2009; or Pečarič, 2011) general attempts at redefining the role of state structures and the quality of governance. Nevertheless, efficient PA reforms based on the Weberian concept have been gradual in the last two to three decades. The most radical reform was carried out in 1994 when the functions of municipalities (local selfgovernment) were strictly separated from those of the state administration. Reforms in Slovenian PA were introduced in several steps, mainly in the phases of creation of the new state, its PA modernization, Europeanization<sup>7</sup> and consolidation. The respective changes were introduced with different approaches, from parliamentary strategies to legislative amendments and individual organizational measures (in detail see Kovač & Virant, 2011). Legal issues, such as regulation of PA structures and the civil service system, were based on domestic and European Commission’s priorities. An example of a successful non-legislative approach is the program for cutting off red tape and removing administrative barriers in force since 2000 and still sustainable (Kovač & Virant, 2011, p. 247). The Slovenian PA is presently structured in several layers and consists of app. 45,000 civil servants in state administration with 14 ministries and app. 30 executive agencies within ministries and 58 local administrative units (state administration being constantly rationalized in terms of number of agencies as well as



employees), and 212 municipalities with additional work force of altogether over 160,000 civil servants also in health, education and similar sectors.

**PA in India as an Autonomous Scientific Discipline:** Considering the German-Austrian tradition, PA in India was primarily law-driven, in order to ensure legal certainty in the sense of the a priori and predictable restriction of authority (Peters & Pierre, 2005, p. 267). Thus, it was predominantly developed by lawyers as opposed to political scientists in the UK and the USA (cf. in depth in Schuppert, 2000, pp. 41–48; Raadschelders, 2011, pp. 156–181). Yet, having in mind an integrative as well as an interdisciplinary approach to PA with its wicked and complex issues, PA studies developed in this region – particularly after 2009 due to pressures of financial crisis and internationalization in higher education – more in a complementary managerial and economic manner. This opened the question of a truly integrative research on PA (for autonomy of a science see e.g. Raadschelders, 2011, pp. 4–12, on ontology, epistemology and methodology). As indicated by several research studies, PA in India is continuously developing in the framework of a multidisciplinary or perhaps administrative legal science rather than in an inter- or even trans- or adisciplinary manner (cf. Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot., 2015, p. 425, more for India under the German tradition in Kovač, 2013b). However, the majority of scholars claim administrative science has been acknowledged as autonomous, as occurred in Western Europe, since the 18th century, and particularly the early and mid-20th century.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of development, PA in India and Europe or beyond witnesses a transition from the initial integration of the PA mother disciplines into interdisciplinary administrative science, but in parallel in time and space also disintegration and differentiation (Pusić, 2002, pp. 53–59).

**Conclusion:** Public administration is an important part of the society which either provides for the welfare of its people and organizations or blocks them. It cannot be neutral; PA can only stimulate or aggravate sustainable development. Its development, as a discipline and in practice by reforming and modernizing its functions, procedures, structures and management, is consequentially very important. The problem is especially pressing in Eastern Europe and in India in particular due to ongoing transitional and post-socialism related phenomena, such as excessive formalism and hierarchy, lack of administrative capacity and accountability, etc. Developing PA by scientific methods and publication therefore plays a key role. In this respect, content analysis as a method of identification of the state of affairs and further trends is a valuable approach. As shown in this paper, CA offers empirical grounds to assess the original



point and its potential gap in relation to the set goals. CA is in this context an objective base to formulate further measures. As for the IPAR editorial policy in connection to the general development of Slovenian PA, we can see that there is room for improvement especially in terms of a more interdisciplinary evolution and even more comparative and cross-border oriented theory and practice, all on the level of content of research and papers as well as authors' affiliation. Similar holds true for the quality of quantitative surveys reported in the papers – considerable room for improvement has been identified, mainly related to the usage of more advanced statistical techniques for data analysis and adequate reporting on the sample size, its construction and response rate. Likewise, we believe that since the number of references listed is also one of the indicators of research quality, the review process should include this dimension as well. Combining the above emphasized issues we can finally answer the main research questions posed at the beginning. Apparently, PA in India is not sufficiently interdisciplinary, which has been verified subjectively, descriptively, and empirically. All key PA disciplines need encouragement and the wicked issues of contemporary PA can be resolved only by involving all those disciplines as relevant ones. The most recurrent topics of public finances, HRM and TQM, administrative procedures and individual public policies prove to be themes that require more than the multidisciplinary approach presently applied. All disciplines (or topics) are equally important and all need to be urgently taken into account due to the complexity of the modern society with globalization, digitalization, revised holders of power, etc. The same goes for the question of international orientation. If decades ago national and pure theoretical levels sufficed, the current society simply does not allow inert and distant attitude anymore, more so in the case of small states members of the EU, such as Slovenia. Hence, PA must evolve as more open both (1) in the regional and global setting and in (2) researching by academia the real problems from practice and conveying theoretical findings back into practice.

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