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# The Europeanization of Public Administration teaching

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## Abstract

Despite several decades of the Europeanization of Higher Education there is no single European model for teaching Public Administration (PA). Neither is there a single model of public administration in practice, even if European countries have been witnessing an extension of the European policy and administrative space as well as pressures for public sector convergence. Yet, this article shows that PA teaching has Europeanized in two significant ways. First, while the Europeanization of curricular content was still in its infancy 25 years ago, PA programs now project European content in their curricula. Second, and more importantly, Europeanization of PA has emerged, not as a movement to creating identikit education in PA, but as a common understanding of the quality of a discipline that remains necessarily context bound by its national, local and international dimensions. Following accepted complementary perspectives on Europeanization, the article explains the development of sustainable European PA institutions and standards for PA teaching as the result of responses to EU incentives as well as of social learning within transnational networks of European PA scholars. The article analyzes the process and results of collaborative peer-learning activities in the European scholarly community, including the Erasmus-Socrates collaborative PA networks, the European Accreditation of Public Administration Programs and the definition of a European set of PA competences that are used in PA program development and quality control. It also revisits questions of convergence and the relative Europeanization of content at the bottom-end of delivering learning outcomes, by analyzing the constitution and content of a sample of Western European PA programs that have been accredited by the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation.

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*Keywords:* Public Administration; Europeanization; Higher Education; Accreditation

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s in Europe, a process was set in motion toward the convergence of higher education. The European Union supported mobility of students and staff, the development of the European Credit Transfer System, and the intergovernmental harmonization of bachelor (graduate) and master (post-graduate) programs under the Bologna process engendered common issues of quality, as well as the convergence of quality control on higher education.

Meanwhile, European Union member states have also been witnessing a trend toward a common European policy and administrative space through the expansion of European regulations and directives in multiple policy domains. This

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brought about processes of capacity building within the administrations of member states, of aspirant member states as well as of other jurisdictions on the European continent engaged in collaborating with EU- and would be EU-member states. Yet, this growing Europeanization of the policy-administrative space has not gone hand in hand with the way public administration systems are organized. Politico-administrative systems are traditionally divergent in Europe, owing to differences in cultures and historical legacies. Some administrative cultures are legalistic, others more managerialist, yet others more governance oriented. Even when there have been common pressures and administrative reform trends in the last 25 years pervading public administrations across Europe, divergence in the translation of these trends prevails over convergence (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Administrations still differ widely over the ways they are organized in federal, regional, or centralized systems. Politico-administrative relations, despite trends toward convergence, still vary substantively across Napoleonic or Westminster models, and across majoritarian or proportional political systems. The ways civil servants are recruited and retained also persist to vary between position systems versus career systems. And global management reforms have been implemented at different speeds, under different guises, and with varying effects.

Just as there is no single European model of public administration, neither is there a single model of Public Administration (PA) teaching in Europe<sup>2</sup>. PA academics may increasingly agree on the core of PA teaching as well as include European content in their curricula. Yet, in view of understanding public administration practices in a national context, and eventually delivering graduates that are employable in national and local public administrations, they are also required to transfer to students PA knowledge that is necessarily local.

The persistent divergence of PA teaching is visible in the variation of academic homes that host PA higher education. Schools, Departments and Institutes in Europe each have quite diverse histories and this is evident in the disciplinary embeddedness today. In France, one would typically find PA taught in Law Schools or to some extent in political science and sociology. In the Netherlands, PA developed into an independent discipline, almost in an emancipation from political science, but one will often find PA schools housed with political sciences still in faculties of social sciences, and only occasionally in law faculties. In central and eastern Europe, PA is often taught in Economics faculties, reflecting the legacy of central economic planning in communist times. Yet another home to PA programs, especially those with a managerial focus, is business schools, as is often the case in the UK. The divergence of PA programs in Europe has been shown empirically by Hajnal (2003), whose quantitative analysis of the relative disciplinary weight of curriculum components in 191 European PA programs pointed at the existence of three program identities. The first ‘legalistic type’ of PA teaching is dominated by law. The second ‘public type’ is typically fed by social and political sciences, and the third ‘corporate type’ shows a predominance of management and economic curriculum components. According to Hajnal (2003), a number of Continental European countries are characterized by a broad and significant political science component, typical of the public type. The Nordic countries put a stronger emphasis on business administration. Most Southern European countries, and a number of post-communist countries, had law predominate in their PA curricula. To what extent the latter group has moved away from the legalistic model is treated elsewhere in this issue. In this article, we shall revisit the three models, when reviewing the disciplinary homes and curriculum components of PA Master programs in a number of Western-European countries.

The European Union does not have much legal authority itself in higher education. Formally, national education systems are hardly affected through European regulations or directives, the so-called hierarchical mechanisms of Europeanization (Heidbreder, 2011). The European Union cannot by way of regulation encroach upon the way higher education is financed and organized by governments in the European Education Area. Yet, the Europeanization of higher education is becoming increasingly apparent, owing to spillover effects from the mobility of European nationals as well as from transnational activities of universities and their staff. The free movement of persons and non-discrimination regulations, for instance, have indirect consequences for the fees with which higher education is financed and grants students may acquire. More importantly, higher education is Europeanizing through a number of horizontal mechanisms that have emerged in the wake of managing and recognizing student and staff mobility. Collaborative university projects and consortia have, in many domains, contributed to the development of joint curricula, joint conferences, joint programs, and more broadly to the development of European academic and epistemic communities. Likewise, PA has in the past 25 years Europeanized, in the sense that transnational activities have contributed to the inclusion of European content in curricula, as well as to mutual learning and a common

<sup>2</sup> This article uses PA to refer to the discipline of Public Administration and pa to refer to the practice of public administration.

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