

Call for Papers

**Measuring and comparing the performance of public sectors
and public institutions**

EGPA Study Group on productivity and quality in the public sector

Conference of the European Group of Public Administration (EGPA)
19-22 September, 2007, Madrid

Comparing performance

The EGPA Study Group on Productivity and Quality in the Public Sector studies aspects of public sector performance. Public sector performance topics in the past have included the use of trust and satisfaction indicators, case studies of organisational performance, measurement issues and the utilisation of public sector performance information.

For the period 2007-2010, a new research theme has been defined:

**“Measuring and comparing the performance of
public sectors and public institutions”**

In brief:

- a) it is about comparisons;
 - a. about international comparisons of public sectors
 - b. about comparisons of public institutions within a country
- b) it is about measurement, about the metrics
- c) it is a Public Administration (PA) approach; it also searches for the social mechanisms and behaviour behind the measures and comparisons

Research subject:

	Bureaumerics	Social mechanisms
Comparisons of Public sectors Between countries		
Comparisons of Public institutions Within country		

Two dimensions set the boundaries of what we study.

1. First, we look at comparisons of countries' public sectors and at comparisons of public institutions within countries. Comparing the performance of public sector and public institutions is becoming increasingly important:

- In 2003, the European Central Bank issued the working paper "Public Sector Efficiency: an International Comparison" (Afonso, Schuknecht, and Tanzi, 2003), which attracted quite some media attention because it allowed to rank and compare the efficiency of public sectors in Europe. The ECB's attempt was a novel and applauded one, but discussion remains about the selection and interpretation of indicators used in the analysis.
- In autumn 2004, the Dutch EU presidency released the book "Public performance: An international comparison of education, health care, law and order and public administration" (Social and Cultural Planning Office, 2004). Attempts were made to compare public sectors in the EU, but the book also made a point of complaining about the quality of available data.
- OECD has started an initiative on "Management in government: comparative country data", with the aim to improve data. It speaks of government as an under-measured sector. Demand for an indicator measuring overall administrative performance of governments is high, though these demands may not always be realistic.
- In several countries, performance of public institutions is measured, ranked and compared. The UK public sector is (in)famous for its use of rankings, but we see similar developments in other countries. Are public and political reactions to rankings the same in all countries? Do rankings always evoke the same extent of perverse consequences as in the UK? If this is true, why is it?

2. We focus on measurement as well as the social mechanisms that explain why comparisons are made up and with what effect.

Measurement is about the metrics. What is the methodology behind the comparisons? Are the metrics sound? How are indices compiled?. How are we proceeding? To what extent are methodologies for within-country comparisons and international comparisons interchangeable? Do they face the same challenges? Or do we need a specific kind of bureaumerics for comparing public sectors – 'a macrobureaumeric'?

Public Administration as a discipline looks beyond the metrics. We also want to identify the *social mechanisms* behind both the within-country and the between-country comparisons (Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998). Measurement and comparisons are seldom unobtrusive, nor intended to be unobtrusive. What are the policy assumptions, interests, ideologies, belief systems, etc. behind the comparisons? What are the reactions to measurement?

Three objectives of the study group's 2007 – 2009 programme.

Objective 1: To gain insight in how overall performance of public administrations at the macro-level is and can be assessed, if it can be assessed at all.

First, surprisingly, even though PA researchers have measured the performance of specific public services, not much research exists where PA scholars have attempted to map the performance of countries' entire public sectors. This is a topic that has great potential in comparative public administration. Until now, this field is almost exclusively claimed by economists.

Objective 2: To learn more about the social mechanisms behind rankings in public sectors through a comparative approach of national practices.

Second, although the field of international comparisons has not received much attention from the PA community, PA scholars did study national comparisons of public institutions. These studies can teach us a lot about the way national administrative cultures and structures deal with these rankings. Does a ranking of hospitals evoke the same social mechanisms in say the UK and Finland?

Objective 3: To improve theories of measurement, by studying cases of measures and comparisons of the public sectors and public institutions.

Thirdly, one may hypothesise that findings on the role of measurement and comparison in national public sectors will also be valid for the role of international measures and comparisons in the international arena. If this hypothesis holds, then this may be an important step towards better theories of measurement, i.e. to middle range findings that go beyond a particular case.

Papers for the Madrid – 2007 meeting

We invite papers that fit within the research subject and objectives of the Study Group. We thus invite papers that deal with

- the metrics of and/or the social mechanisms behind within-country comparisons of public institutions
- the metrics of and/or the social mechanisms behind international comparisons of public sectors

Practicalities

The EGPA Study Group on Productivity and Quality in the Public Sector was founded in 1986. It has mainly dealt with performance measurement issues. From 2001 to 2003, papers dealt with the question whether a well-functioning public sector will lead to satisfied customers and trusting citizens. Since 2004, the focus is on performance measurement and performance management. Papers from previous conferences have been published in symposia and special issues of the *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Public Performance and Management Review* and *the International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*. An edited book on the utilisation of performance information is being prepared.

Study Group website: <http://www.kuleuven.be/egpa>

Practical information on the EGPA 2007 conference, and the other study groups, can soon be found on the main website of EGPA and IIAS (<http://www.iiasiisa.be>) and at the dedicated conference website <http://www.egpa2007.com>

Please submit a short abstract outlining

- the title of the paper
- a short description of the contents of the paper (maximum 1 page)
- the research method of your contribution, and the empirical material to be used
- name, affiliation, and contact information of the author(s)

The deadline for the abstracts is **May 1st, 2007**

Final acceptance will be notified by the end of May 2007.

Final papers are due by July 31st.

Papers will be made available on the Study Group Website. Due to time restraints, a maximum of 15 papers will be accepted. Paper presenters will be expected to prepare a short presentation.

Please mail paper proposals in .doc, or .rtf format to the study group convenors:

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