EGPA Annual Conference, 10-12 September 2014, Speyer, Germany

The 2014 Annual Conference of the European Group on Public Administration will be held in Speyer in Germany from 10 to 12 September 2014.

Call for Papers - French-Speaking Seminar

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- Benoît RIGAUD, PhD, chargé de recherche, ENAP, Québec, Canada.

Coordinators:
- Robert FOUCHET, professeur, Université d’Aix-Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, France.
- Emil TURC, Maître de Conférences, Université d’Aix-Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, France.

The Seminar provides a unique opportunity for debates in French within EGPA’s annual congress. While open to English contributions, it confirms our wider community’s interest for a linguistic space that provides alternative vocabulary, patterns of thought, scientific approaches and norms, and political-administrative cultures.

As a group, the seminar listens closely to the issues and needs of the practitioners of public management, and is dedicated to its scientific mission of knowledge renewal and enhancement. Hence, we invite researchers and confirmed practitioners to dialogue across scientific sessions, round tables, and a variety of professional accounts from the field.

This year’s edition of EGPA’s French-speaking Seminar is organized in collaboration with IGPDE (Institute for public management and economic development), agency of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance (Paris, Bercy, France) dedicated to research, the training of civil servants, and providing support for public policies and reforms.

Acting managers in public policy networks: New practices and solutions under the pressure of budget cuts and performance expectations

The previous editions of the French-speaking seminar (F2S) underlined the multiplication of constraints in the work environment of public managers. Amongst these the surge of
reporting and performance evaluations, pressures from public service users and the context of crisis, decreasing endowments, the pervasiveness of ICTs, social networks, participative and co-productive logics. The era invites to swift decision-making, constant change management, imagination, and innovation.

One of the reasons is the complex and fluid context of contemporary public affairs. Throughout Europe, most fields of public policy (health, urban planning, economic development, transport, social relief) are implemented through networks. The governance concept overshadows the government and administrative tasks (Frederikson 2005) and brings together State and local administrations, agencies, citizens, and businesses.

This topic is over familiar to public administrators. ‘Big problems are in need of big solutions’. Devolutions in Southern Europe and NPM in the Northern countries have left behind a fragmented landscape of authority, information, and resources. As a result, interdependence is organized under contractual forms (State-Region project agreements, urban development contracts) or institutionally (poles of competitiveness, regional clusters, groupings of territorial cooperation). The EU encouraged this approach through its management of structural funds (Jordana et al. 2012) and further formalized multi-level partnerships as principles of community action (Art. 11 of EU regulation No 1303/2013).


However, management practitioners confirm the need to revisit these concepts. The economic and debt crises changed the games throughout the EU. Public administrations clarify their missions, performance, and accountabilities, and redraw their budgets around core priorities. How does this impact collaborative work? How can the continuity of partnerships be maintained? And their goals? How can public managers bear out their own charges and objectives within these networks?

The answer to these questions is to be searched in the microdynamics of network participation and activities. Indeed, global analyses of administrative systems are progressively downplayed. Thus, the World Bank recently reviewed its doctrine (2012) and highlighted the risks of an excessive focus on structural reforms and universal solutions. This provides impetus to the idea that “good-enough governance” makes up a satisfying basis (Grindle 2013, 2007), and that researchers are to join the public actors in looking for targeted, flexible, and creative solutions to concrete issues of collaborative management. Therefore heed may be given to managerial discretion, the adaptation needs coming from the field, to the emergent and self-organizing features of network activities.

Hence we encourage the joint exploration by researchers and practitioners of the empirical, day-to-day tasks and challenges of network activities. We welcome grounded theorizing, case studies, accounts of practical experience, along with bold theorizations. The aim is to shed light on the micro- and meso-dynamics of partnership systems, to discuss the factors of political sociability, the networks’ outcomes and processes. Also, we need to explore how austerity affects these interactions and, eventually, gives rise to a new figure of the public network manager. We thus prolong the Seminar’s previous editions, whose focus on the manager, the skills, knowledge, and tools he needs in dealing with shared activities and aims, must provide administrators with useful hands-on information in dealing with current concerns.
The list hereby provides an unexclusive collection of topics open to discussion:

1. **Resource management and the rationalization of networked public actions.** The austerity context induces two contrasting views of network costs. On one hand, joint action is seen as a means to contain the fragmentation of actors and resources. It reduces overlaps, encourages mutualizations, synergies, and economies of scale. On the other hand, partnerships generate excessive overhead, transaction and coordination costs, slow decision-making and implementation. Inclination to tests, self-organization, and unchecked innovations may also be viewed as inefficient. Can audit and management control account for these financial stakes? Which are the main paths for network rationalization? Does the cost-consciousness of network members endanger their existence, or can network legitimacy be strengthened through economic calculus and perception management?

2. **Measures of network performance, expectations and accountability in a crisis context.** The establishment of performance measurements for networked activities gives rise to complex and reciprocated accountabilities. Collective and political responsibilities are balanced with the expectations of partner institutions (Hondeghem & Stee 2013). Then again, growing financial pressures set forth requests of efficacy and efficiency. Can contemporary evaluation tools and practices provide satisfactory answers? Does the crisis context induce specific trends? Simplification? Greater elaboration? Are shared, multidimensional, and ambiguous accountabilities (Laegreid & Mattei 2013) functional or dysfunctional? Does perceptions management overcome effective measures?

3. **Tools and practices of public network members.** Within networks, the horizontality of interactions, the plurality of actors, the diversity of goals, interests, and strategies explain the salience of negotiation as practice (Jordana et al. 2012). The participants’ first duty is to establish a favorable framework for interaction and collective decisions. Hence, suggestions are made to trade planning for goal finding and perception accommodation, organizing for the choice of flexible arrangements, leading for the arts of communication and coordination (Klijn 2005). Nonetheless, planning and future studies are thoroughly maintained. Are they effective, or mere facades for legitimacy and control? When is it reasonable to cut down or enforce the tools of monitoring and activity control? Are ICTs and shared norms helpful to establish dialogue and mutual understanding? Does Europeanization support these trends?

4. **Networks as politics.** Although institutions leave a heavy imprint on the emergence and activity of partnerships (Ysa & Esteve 2013), personal relations, initiative, and character are tantamount for organizing and deploying negotiation processes. Networks are arenas (Klijn 2005) whose creation, rule setting, and stability depend on personal capacities to pool common interests, generate trust, establish and confirm memberships, exclusion, and legitimacy. Social network methods have long contributed to the identification of critical roles and the explanation of network integration or dissolution. They may shed further light on the identity and roles of initiators, leaders, and referees. But what lessons can provide further qualitative, bourdieusian approaches (Georgakakis & Weisbein 2010, Arnholtz 2012)? Can the crisis transform the participants’ resources and symbolic capital? Have networks become more conflict-prone? How big are the risks to see the networks’ politics drive out production functions? Can and should this be avoided?

5. **Distributed leadership and decision behaviors in network management.** The managers’ decisions in this context raise many questions. Uncertainties influence the choice of solutions, but also their timing, and problem definition (Klijn 2005). The margins and rules of decision-making are open to innovation, and some individual or collective leadership is indeed requested. How are these constructed? Are the managers’ or the politicians’ roles
favored by the crisis, and is this a positive or negative influence on network functions? How do members mix their leadership, co-leadership, and follower roles? How difficult will that be and to what effects?

6. Competence and strategies in networks. The choice of network representatives in originating institutions is governed by complex criteria. Capacities to influence a social group are frequently cited, but “followership” strategies may be equally effective. Recruitment must take into account a qualifying resource basis: authority, negotiating talents, social attachment, trust, and acquaintance capital (Jordana et al. 2012), as well as technical and institutional skills (Georgakakis et de Lassalle 2007). Will the crisis impose also a return of ethical values and a culture of cohesiveness (Christensen et Laegreid 2011)? Or does it favor pragmatism, creative, flexible, but also less controllable profiles (Grindle2013)?

Deadlines and submission
We invite researchers and practitioners to submit a two-page abstract with the following format:

- Communication title
- Topics or keywords
- Main issues or research questions
- Brief outline of research methods or empirical approaches
- First results
- Selective bibliography
- Name of the authors, organizational membership, coordinates (address, email, telephone number)

Proposals should be uploaded through the submission website www.egpa-conference2014.org until May 15th 2014
Deadline for decision and selection by the co-chairs: 1 June 2014
Deadline for submitting the complete papers: 5 August 2014

For more information, please contact the Seminar’s coordinator:

Dr. Emil TURC
CERGAM
Institut de Management Public et Gouvernance Territoriale
Université d’Aix-Marseille
emil.turc@univ-amu.fr

Further information is available on the conference website:
http://www.iias-iisa.org/egpa/events/egpa-annual-conferences/upcoming-conference/

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES
rue Defacqz, 1, box 11
B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel : +32 2 536 08 80
Fax : +32 2 537 97 02
e-mail : info@iias-iisa.org

EUROPEAN GROUP FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
f.maron@iias-iisa.org


