

Debate of the Administrative Science Scholarly Journals' Editors-In-Chief in Ljubljana

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The Faculty of Administration, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia organized a round table with editors-in-chief of international scholarly journals in the field of public administration and governance from Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe.

The round table was moderated by Associate Professor Polonca Kovač from the Faculty of Administration, who is newly appointed editor-in-chief of the Central European Public Administration Review. The participants were Professors Juraj Nemeč (Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, editor-in-chief of the NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy), Călin Emilian Hînțea (Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, editor-in-chief of the Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences) and Ivan Koprić (Zagreb University & Institute of Public Administration, Zagreb, Croatia, editor-in-chief of the Croatian and Comparative Public Administration).

The round table was held in Ljubljana on April 19, 2018, as part of the International Workshop on the Role of Public Administration in Public Policies' Design. Questions and issues for the debate were designed by Professor Polonca Kovač.

Answers given by Professor Ivan Koprić are the following:

1. Can you share with us some of your initial thoughts regarding tradition v. renovation of running journals in our field?
 - Path dependency has a significant role: history matters in our decisions about journals. Moreover, relevant context matters, and the context is continuously changing. I am inclined to say

that it is changing in an increasingly dynamic manner. Twenty years ago, we might have been aware that certain changes in journals' practices would be needed, that certain level of internationalisation was beneficial, and that the exchange of knowledge with practitioners and academics from abroad fertilized our scientific field and expertise. Ten years ago, we were well aware of these and other changes. But now, we have to run if we wish to stay alive. If we as editors, our editorial boards, or our publishers do not wish to embrace these huge challenges, we are practically dead in terms of scientific relevance. I will try to be brave and offer the following conclusion: we are almost dead even with all our efforts to modernize our journals and harmonize them with the best standards – in terms of scientific relevance. However, we can easily compare the situation with two-faced Janus, an ancient Roman god. The other side of the problem is manifold: our domestic colleagues, ties with our national or regional academic milieu, inability of many of our colleagues and authors to achieve the highest standards of scientific and research excellence. They also need us, and they put us under pressure to soften (lower) the standards, etc. And the practitioners, the civil servants, cannot really follow us, and are not able to utilize the knowledge we can collect in our journals even now. To conclude, we are sailing between the Scylla of tradition and the Charybdis of modernization.

2. Our journals' scope includes the field of public administration and governance. How do you experience this discipline in terms of their national versus supra/international character?
 - There is a mixture of national and supranational – European and international – elements, research themes and issues. The field is increasingly internationalised. Many themes are circulating around the globe, situated and researched in national and specific regional contexts. On the one hand, there are public-private partnerships, performance and quality management, administrative simplification, one-stop shop principle, human resource development, administrative education, organizational culture, etc.: there are many themes we recognize as universally relevant and because of that, convenient for research and scientific analyses in the national, regional, and international contexts. On the other hand, there are certain scientifically relevant issues that are nationally coloured, such as the specificities of legal regulation of local governance or the particularities of administrative proceedings, which

call for investing scientific efforts in encrypting unique national phenomena and non-replicable national circumstances.

3. Several analyses have revealed (such as content analysis of IPAR, HKJU and NISPAcee Journal in 2016 and 2017) that some PA related disciplines are highly represented (e.g. economics) while others are rather neglected. In addition, there are only rare papers to be truly multi/interdisciplinary. What are your views about overrepresentation vs. underrepresentation of disciplines, or how much they are truly interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary?
 - I do not deem counting and systematizing published papers into disciplinary boundaries as a useful approach. Insisting on disciplines and their strict differentiation in our field is counter-productive. What we need is intensive mutual learning among researchers and authors working in the public administration field. We as the journals have to stimulate such learning process by making room for multidisciplinary themes and for authors who are able to theorise and research in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary manner. We also have to think about and search for the new themes that connect people with different basic educational backgrounds, such as diversity and representative governance, evaluation and knowledge utilisation, legally bounded public management, entrepreneurial administrative culture, digital and learning organization, smart cities, behavioural public administration, etc.
4. Transfer of knowledge within academia and with our colleagues - experts in government and the public sector.
 - First of all, we have to attract a wide circle of authors and proactively teach them how to write for our journals. We should not act as passive receivers of papers and blind and empty managers of the editorial boards. After all, we are teachers, we should teach, we should widen our research and scientific communities, and we ought to serve as the linking pins (a Rensis Likert's concept) between our editorial boards and authors from national and international practice and academia. The real question is how to do that? A lot of effort should be invested in this type of activity, in thinking, exchanging and nurturing ideas with our colleagues, in organizing conferences, roundtables and workshops, in developing projects, in fostering various kinds of cooperation with practitioners and their organizations, in teaching our assistants and other PhD students how to become excellent scientists, etc.

5. What do you think about language (English – national languages) and open access?
- In the Croatian and Comparative Public Administration (previously Croatian Public Administration) we can distinguish four different developmental stages.
 - a. 1998-2005. In our early volumes we published only papers in Croatian and the journal was titled Croatian Public Administration, in the Croatian language, of course – Hrvatska javna uprava. The papers authored by foreign authors were translated into Croatian. Why? To facilitate the reception and transfer of knowledge to practice. A vast majority of practitioners were not able to read in English, or that was a shared understanding.
 - b. 2005-2010. I was appointed editor-in-chief in October 2005 when the journal was in deep crisis, and published only one issue in the spring of 2005 after jumping over 2003 and 2004 without a single published paper. I invested much energy in the journal, from new design and internet page to attracting authors, the Editorial Board members, and collaborators. I have been editor-in-chief for twelve years and we have published 12 volumes, four issues per volume, between 16 and 30 scientific papers per volume, with many additional contributions: glossary, court and administrative practice, reactions, book reviews, and others. Thus, we have succeeded in gathering a wide array of people from academia to the government, many of them from abroad. At the beginning, our base was the Croatian academia and public sector and we were focused on papers in Croatian. However, we were also able to attract a number of papers from abroad. The focus on papers in Croatian was necessary for our survival at the time, because we were financed mainly through subscriptions.
 - c. 2011-2016. Then, in 2010 we decided to open our journal to authors and reviewers from abroad as widely as possible. We changed the title into Croatian and Comparative Public Administration, adding the comparative component. In parallel, we managed to enter certain bases and attract many new, excellent authors and renowned scholars from abroad. Our Ministry of Education granted us substantive amounts of money per year, which enabled us to offer open access to more content on our main publisher's internet page. The ratio between papers published in Croatian and in English changed continuously, reach-

- ing fifty – fifty score, with prospects for reaching a ratio of 80 per cent papers in English vs. 20 per cent of papers in Croatian in 2018. Simultaneously, we opened access to all scientific papers published in the journal.
- d. 2017-2018. The fourth period started at the beginning of 2017, when we significantly redesigned the journal. Namely, we separated scientific papers from other contents. While we need to reach the best standards requested for indexing and abstracting in the best international bases, we also wish to retain the interest and support of our domestic expert community. Because of that, during 2017, we published our four regular issues and, in addition, we prepared two supplements for our subscribers with news, court and administrative practice, comments, reactions, expert reports, professional papers, etc. We have recently transferred the journal to a separate internet page and introduced the open journal system, making our editorial and review processes fully transparent. Last but not least, we have entered the WoS Core Collection - Emerging Sources Citation Index. It is a small but important step. Recently we have also improved our editorial process by publishing ORCID code in information about the paper authors. ORCID, Open Researcher and Contributor ID, is an alphanumeric code for unique identification of scientific and other academic authors and contributors. The next step is the assignment of DOI, digital object identifier, to each of the published papers, which makes identification of the e-version of published papers much easier and more reliable.
 - e. To summarise, we are retaining the contents in the Croatian language for our practitioners, but we wish them to read scientific papers mainly in English. Our assessment is that our subscribers are now able to do so. However, we still publish papers in Croatian. The share of such papers will decrease in years to come. With regard to open access, there is no doubt that we need to enable it when scientific papers are in question, regardless of the language in which they are written. Other contents, published in supplement only for our subscribers, will be downloadable without paywall after approximately one year.
6. Journals are under significant pressure of “commercialisation”; at least regarding the indexation in SSCI, Scopus, etc., in order to attract quality researchers and papers, and to get the impact. How do you tackle this aspect?

- Indexation and “commercialisation” have become inevitable parts of our work. We have to respect and follow the standards. Indexation is an excellent tool for improving our journals’ quality. Although we ought to set our goals realistically, and not overrate the significance of indexation and measurement of impact, we have to use all these new criteria as a tool for improving our editing and review processes, and to work on quality improvement, ethical standards, and other important values and goals. Although we need to be part of a broader scholarly network of journals, we should retain our connections with national, regional, and European academic, scientific, research, and policy communities. We cannot take over a leading role in the world but we can, and have to strengthen our ties within Europe and continuously, diligently, and steadily work on improving the quality of administrative science in the national, regional, and European contexts.
7. All of you are experienced editors-in-chief. How do you see the key roles of scholar publishing stakeholders, primarily authors, revisers and editors, and publishers in addition? In this context, what kind of resources and professional teams are required to be able to publish regularly and at certain qualitative level?
 - Enthusiasm is not sufficient any more. We need a professional manager or at least professional support to the editorial team. Having in mind a need for further internationalisation, I advocate for the appointment of two out of four members of the core editorial team from abroad. Managing communication among editors and the Editorial Board members, work on indexing and abstracting, managing subscriptions and relations with publishers require at least one professional with full-time contract. And of course, this opens the issue of money and ways of procuring it. What is certain is that an easy way to earn money and recruit capable professional does not exist.
 8. Do you see any concrete forms of strengthening collaboration of our journals when striving for the shared goals?
 - Exchange of information, meetings, common projects, workshops, mutual learning are among the basic methods. We have a lot of space for improving our collaboration. Cooperation is definitely needed. Establishment of a network of journals in CEE and SEE region can be beneficial to all of us, but we need to pre-

serve and cultivate each journal's specificities and separate identities as well. Having in mind how many authors seek publishing opportunities in our field today, we as the journals actually do not compete.