

COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

THE CIRCULATION OF INSTRUMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE MODELS - ENA - FRANCE

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Abstract

The diffusion of models and instruments of public governance can take different paths and forms. National schools of public administration as the institutions in charge of the training of civil servants in certain countries are very relevant frameworks to observe the way executives are prepared to perform their duty and tasks at different levels and in different fields and how they are confronted with different management tools and models. Based on the case of the French national school of public administration (ENA), this paper describes in which circumstances trainees are exposed to foreign public administration models or practices and why such schools that are supposed to be place for the reproduction and transmission of national public administration patterns can also contribute to the broader circulation of instruments and administrative models.

ЦИРКУЛАЦИЯТА НА АДМИНИСТРАТИВНИ МОДЕЛИ И ИНСТРУМЕНТИ – ЕНА - ФРАНЦИЯ

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Резюме

Разпространението на модели и инструменти на публично управление може да има много различни пътища и форми. Националните школи по публична администрация и институциите, които отговарят за обучението на държавните служители в някои страни, задават подходящи рамки за наблюдение на това как представителите на изпълнителната власт се подготвят да изпълняват своя дълг и задачи на различни нива и в различни области на своята система за публична администрация и как те се сблъскват с различни модели и инструменти на управление. Въз основа на случая с френското национално училище по публична администрация (ENA), тази статия описва при какви обстоятелства стажантите са изложени на чужди модели или практики на публичната администрация и защо такива училища, които би трябвало да са място за възпроизвеждане и разпространяване на национални модели на публичната администрация, могат да допринесат за разпространението на инструменти и административни модели.

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Introduction

Particularly in Europe, the exchange of ideas, practices and instruments of public administration between nations has a long tradition. In the case of the European Union's member states, two main political factors can be seen as external sources for the introduction of new modes of management and governance in national systems.

First, the impact of European integration on member states' administrations via the implementation of EU-Law and the emerging European administrative area makes adaptations necessary as part of the process of Europeanization.

Second, the effects of globalization put nation states under scrutiny and pressure via rankings and international comparisons, especially because of the role played by some transnational structures – international organisations or non-governmental organisations – such as OECD, IMF, Transparency international, or Doing business...²

Yet, as Thomas Risse, rightly stated more than 20 years ago, “Ideas do not float freely”. In his seminal contribution to the constructivist theory of international relations, Thomas Risse underlined two major dimensions that are most relevant when one tries to understand how ideas “travel” in the world and what happen to them (Risse-Kappen, 1994). The first one, is that ideas intervene between material power-related factors on the one hand, and state interests and preferences on the other. The second relevant dimension he underlines, is that ideas are embedded in institutions. Decision makers are always exposed to several and often contradictory policy concepts. To understand the conditions under which specific ideas are selected and influence policies while others fall, it is necessary to have a close look at the domestic structure of the state the actors are related to, that is, the nature of its political institutions, state-society relations, and the values and norms embedded in its political culture (Risse-Kappen, 1994: 187).

In general, the issue of transnational transfers of administrative models and instruments and their influence on the governance in different countries can be tackled from various perspectives. Numerous studies have been conducted on the actors that intervene as agents of change in this regards. This includes the content of what is presented as “best practices”, “benchmarks”, “solutions” or instruments to successful conduct reforms for the modernization of public administrations, as well as the role and motives of the institutions which are at the source of this transfer. Another major strand of research focuses on the “export” of concepts and solutions and

² Regarding the issue of better law making in a country like France, two international organisations have played an important role in the debate on the necessity to make it a political priority and part of the reform process and a condition for good governance: the OECD and the European Union (see Bartoli, Jeannot, Larat, 2016).

on the use of foreign experiences, ie. both on the transfer of administrative models as well as on the results

Interestingly, little attention is paid to the concrete conditions of such “transfers”: How it happens? What are the vectors for the diffusion of such ideas within a national administrative system? How civil servants come into contacts with them? How models do become legitimized?

In order to bring some answers to these important questions, our chapter will focus on the role of some key actors in the field of public management, in particular when it comes to the transmission of relevant knowledge and administrative practices. Because they in charge of professional training of those who have to run public services and to implement public policies, national schools of public administration (NSPA) are major actors in the transmission and reproduction of the norms, principles, practical as well as theoretical knowledge that are officially considered by a state as necessary for its public administration.

Circulation rather than transfer

In the line with the recent research conducted by French scholars (Hadjinski and Vivier, 2017), we prefer in this chapter not to use the concept of “transfer” to apprehend the phenomenon of traveling ideas, for this notion assumes there is an intentional transmission of an unambiguous message in a particular direction. Concerning new ideas related to public administration and public management, we argue that national administrative systems are not passive recipients of “imported” foreign models or instruments, but can at the same time produce and export some ideas, and in any case actively contribute to the transformation of guiding ideas and principles. In opposite to the notion of “transfer”, the concept of “circulation” has the advantage to give a more differentiated picture of the traveling ideas or models, since it means a non-linear, multidirectional and polymorphic process in which the objects that circulate does not remain unaffected by the transmission and the way they are received, interpreted and – sometimes – re-appropriated.

Analysing traveling ideas as a transfer can indeed be by far too simplistic. When broad international comparisons and typologies are proposed, there is a common trend to oversimplification. For instance, some oversimplified versions of the way new public management (NPM) has been disseminated in Europe have emerged in connection with this approach. In this context, countries like France and Germany have been seen as “keepers of old bureaucracy” which are “not really” reforming their administrations. Actually, as Eymeri-Douzan rightly points it out, the “NPM laggard/maintaining” thesis about France is a misleading stereotype since it is based on a biased conception of NPM, which ignores its double nature. If, like many scholars following a cognitive approach to policy paradigms and paradigm shifts, one

considers NPM as “a generic and trans-cultural intellectually driven revolution whose strength would rely mainly in the diffusion of beliefs, norms, models and languages”, then the worldwide spreading of NPM is likely to be understood as a “quasi-religious movement” and its penetration into a given country must be seen in terms of a “conversion” - or a refusal of conversion - of the politico-administrative elites who pilot the state apparatus (Emery-Douzans, 2013: 503-505).

While the main actions related to NPM which concern efficiency, or the privatisation of some activities have been quite largely undertaken in many Western countries, the procedures set up in France seem to have remained globally more moderate. Reforms implemented in the French public sector therefore depend much more on the creation of an *ad hoc* public management, deemed to improve overall quality and performance, while respecting the values of the French public service, and by avoiding the blind transposition of techniques from the private sector (Bartoli, 2007: 25).

The reason why the circulation of principles and instruments is much more complex than the unidirectional movement of exporting well defined ideas from one country or system to others can be found in the features of the different national administrative systems, or what we mentioned previously as the nature of a country’s political institutions which is related to the way principles and instruments are interpreted depending on national contexts. Geert Bouckaert and Christoph Pollitt rightly observed in their analysis of public management reforms in some OECD countries (2000) that there is a great gap between, on the one side, countries related to the tradition of *Rechtsstaat* like France or Germany for which the state is a structuring element for the society that produces a vision and give sense to it, and on the other side, countries paying great importance to the notion of public interest, which are dedicated to the role of the state providing independency and equity towards private interest, but without expecting for the state neither a vision nor a sense making function.

In fact, when there is something that is assumed to be a change of paradigm for public action (for instance NPM *versus* public law), then the attention-grabbing question is to understand how the different elements of a given public administrative system which is supposed to change will react, when at the same time their very function is to contribute to maintaining the system’s identity and continuity? This particularly hold truth for the organizations in charge of educating and training civil servants.

An apparent paradox

Looking at the contribution of national schools of public administration to the international circulation of international public administration models and instruments may sounds a little bite

like a paradox. In order to demonstrate why it isn't a contradiction and to what extent national schools do participate to the circulation of public administration instruments and models, we will in a first part of this chapter explain what are the specificities of NSPA and their function in their respective national administrative systems, and in a second part, based on the example of the French national school of public administration (ENA), we will present the different modes and forms of exposure to concepts, tools and principles regarding the way public administrations are organized and managed nowadays, which occur at ENA.

1. The role of national schools of public administration in training civil servants and framing their profile

National schools of public administration are very interesting organizations with regards to their contribution to the circulation of public management concepts and instruments due to their governmental status and their place in the administrative architecture of a country, but also because their purpose is *per se* to contribute to the diffusion of ideas and knowledge about and for public administrations. At the same time, the educational and recruitment systems of public servants that are schools of public services are paradigmatic examples of the historically rooted national distinctiveness of public administration traditions (Reichard, 2017: 135).

National schools of public administration can be considered as arenas in which the circulation both of national and of transnational models of public administration and management takes place. For sure, not all countries have NSPA. It is the case in France, in Italy or in Poland (and until recently in the UK). In other countries, education and training in the field of public administration is done by universities.

Having stated this, irrespective of the institutional relationships that exist between training organizations and government institutions, schools of public administration do have an influence on the way public servants perform their duty and tasks, both in their role of setting the conditions for the perpetuation of the system, and as agents of change through promoting new ideas and innovations. However, as pointed out by the OECD in a recent study, the ability of schools to undertake these roles depends in large part on their ability to integrate and translate the priorities of the national government into its programming: "This highlights a two-way relationship between schools and other institutions of government, also in exchanging information about needs and priorities. It also reflects the importance that the national government places on civil service training and professional development" (OECD 2017, 49).

More specifically, NSPA are important mechanism in the reproduction of national public administrations systems and cultures with their values, traditions and particularities. Via their teaching programs, they play the role of transmission belt in the circulation of public administration knowledge, especially as to the transmission of paradigms and the perpetuation of the national *doxa* with regards to what is considered as necessary and right for administrating and governing the country. As to ENA, as a national school, and particularly as a school of and for the administration, it is a privileged place for the production and reproduction of official representations on what is the state and what are or should be its role (Mangenot, 1998).

Training and the transmission of public sector values

Given their mission of selection, recruitment and pre-service or in-service training of civil servants, national schools are often presented as the ideal setting for the transmission of public service values. Together with the family and the workplace, they are considered to be even more important places of transmission and ownership of the values that are a major element not only of the civil service identity but of each national administrative system as well (Larat & Chauvigné, 2015).

The reason why ENA puts so much attention in its training program on deontology and public service values is because they should be part of the mental map of the future public managers. Beside applied knowledge, know-how, some particular skills and competences, these issues are considered to be key to develop professionalism and to ensure the cohesion and homogeneity of the French civil service.

When schools of public administration like ENA belong to the government, it means their teaching program as an official character. The content is mandatory. What is taught and how it is taught reflects the governmental priorities and the curricula as a corpus of norms, principles, instruments and procedures to be learnt represent a kind of logical framework that is aimed at framing the behaviour of the civil servants when performing the duties.

A change of paradigm

Implicitly or explicitly, all the organizations dealing with public administration's training and development, independently from their statute, incorporate the idea that "society and the public sector are changing under the influence of evolutions such as increased internationalism, the intertwining of the public and private sector, the challenges of e-government, climate change, international terrorism and so on. Civil servants need to be prepared to face these new (and future)

challenges” (Pollitt and Op de Beck, 2010: 26). Hence, the content of training programs must be regularly up-dated and adapted.

In the field of human resource management for instance, one consequence of the introduction of competency management in public administrations has been the greater emphasis placed on “upskilling their workforce, continuing professional development and lifelong learning” (OECD, 2011: 125); this being part of the strategy aiming at making the public workforce more competent, flexible and adaptable. The development of changing competencies also requires new types of training and development approaches. As national institutions with the mandate to provide learning, training and professional development to civil servants, NSPA are key actors for the development of civil service relevant skills and knowledge. In fact, “acquired competencies are often seen as learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities of schools” activities and become an important issue in evaluation of schools’ performance. In this capacity, [they] complement learning and development that occurs as part of workplace activities, and supplement knowledge acquired as part of other formal secondary and post-secondary education and professional development” (OECD, 2017: 25).

According to Hajnal (2003), public administration programmes in Europe can be divided into three groups: a business group (e.g., Denmark, Norway, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), a policy / administration group (e.g., Germany, France) and a legal group (e.g., Poland, Hungary, Portugal, Italy and Greece). Despite of being a country having a strong legalistic tradition, the study of public management in France is becoming more and more important. For Annie Bartoli, a well-informed observer, continuing education for civil servants on issues related to public management and professional studies in the field have flourished, similarly to academic teaching and research. As for initial training in the French higher educational system, it is gradually incorporating - though still modestly - the topic of public management in the curricula (Bartoli, 2007: 14). This trend can also be observed in French NSPA such as INET, the school in charge of training senior civil servant for local authorities, at EHESP, for managers of the health sector, and as we will see in the following chapter at ENA. Yet, the development of public management study and research in France still has deep historical, cultural and institutional roots: “Projected measures needed or required to improve public sector performance are strongly influenced by already existing structures and their legal and cultural base” (Bartoli 2007, 38).

2. Exposure to international models and instruments of public administration in and via national schools

Following Geert Bouckaert, we can consider that, whether - and in what ways - public management reforms change administrative systems are questions that can only be raised in cases of truly substantial reform policies which bring about changes in standards and habits, and as a consequence, in the administrative system itself. Three distinct hypotheses explain the transformation of administrative systems: changing public management tools, pressures; restructuring (Bouckaert, 2003: 105-106). As a matter of fact, to understand transformations, one should have a look at the circumstances in which civil servants, during their professional training, are confronted to such tools and ideas, and in particular to their exposure to the elements that constitute public administration models.

The following table summarizes ENA's different forms of contribution to the circulation of knowledge and practices depending on the orientation given to dissemination, on the kind of public targeted and on its objectives.

TABLE 1: FORMS OF DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES RELATED TO ADMINISTRATIVE MODELS AND INSTRUMENTS AT ENA

Orientation	Public targeted	Objective	Means taken	Form of exposure to PA/PM models and instruments
Internal (needs of French system)	National trainees	Teaching and training	Knowledge required to pass the competitive examination Internships Curriculum	Canonical knowledge as well as managerial and leadership potential Observations 'on the job', with mimetics effect and opportunity to discover foreign systems Using new instruments
	National and international trainees	Mixing publics	International dimension of the training program Exchange of experience	Passive: Contact with foreign civil servants Comparison with foreign systems
External	Team in charge of developing training at ENA	Influence (in)	Monitoring state of the art in the field of public management and administration research Benchmarking and best practices	Participation into international networks
	Foreign PA systems	Influence (out)	Partnerships, twinning programs, conferences	Promoting French model and adaptation to local needs

Exposure to ideas, principles and practices in connection with the entrance examination and during the pre-service training program at ENA

There are two steps regarding the transmission of knowledge regarded as necessary to prepare civil servants performing their tasks and duties. The first one regards the entrance examinations, which content reflect the priorities set by the government as to what is considered both as mandatory prerequisite and as legitimate selection criteria to access the professional training. At ENA, there are two phases of competitive examination³. The qualifying examination phase consists in 5 written essays (public law, economics, contemporary societal issues, social matters and public finances). The examination for admission consists in 5 oral examinations (career interview with a panel, an interaction group assessment, a test on European issues, a test on international questions and a foreign language test). Whereas written examinations have a strong national orientation because they mostly seek to ensure that selected candidates who will become civil servants do have an advanced knowledge on French political institutions, law, social and economic situation and a good command of the body of works that are indicated in the recommended readings, oral examination are more focused on skills and abilities and as such open for principles related to public management.

Even if a first confrontation with public administration and management ideas, principles and practices applying in the French system already happens when candidates to ENA have to deal with canonical knowledge and the jury's expectations, the main exposure takes place during the training period itself which lasts 24 months, both as part of the curriculum and during the professional practice period accounts for nearly 40% of the final mark. The internship period organised at the beginning of training program consists in a 4 months international internship (ie. in an embassy, NGO, UE institutions), a 2 months internship in an enterprise (large companies, SMIs, or start-up) and finally a 5 months internship in public administrations at territorial level (prefectures, or local authorities). During the internship period, trainees assume responsibilities and learn the art of decision making through examples set by senior officials who act as tutors (ambassadors, prefects, mayors, European Commissioners, CEOs of a company, etc...). During the internships in territorial administrations, because students tend to reproduce what they observe and what is given to them as positive examples to follow, this learning process produces a strong mimetics effect that contributes to perpetuate the ruling values, behaviors, procedures and working mechanisms used in the French administrative system. On the opposite, during the

³ There are three ways of access to ENA : the "concours externe" for students having received a university-level diploma for at least the equivalent of three years of studies after secondary school ('A'Levels+3), all candidates now have a Master degree ; the concours "interne" for career civil servants or government employees with at least four years' professional experience; no diploma is required ; and the "troisième concours" for elected officials, labor leaders and private-sector employees, with a total of at least eight years of professional or elected experience; no diploma is required.

international internship, trainees have the opportunity to discover the way public administration works in another countries or in an international organization like the EU and to learn about new concepts and practices⁴.

Changes in the pre-service curriculum

Walter Kickert (2007: 3) identifies three clear examples of countries with a distinctive, typical continental-European, strong legalistic state tradition. This tradition has its roots in the nineteenth-century history of state formation, particularly the establishment of the liberal *Rechtsstaat* in continental Europe, and the legalistic tradition is still prevailing in these three countries. Legalism in the French, German and Italian administrations appeared to have a major impact on the recent managerial reforms in these countries, for the legalistic paradigm fundamentally differs from the managerial one.

Against this background, it isn't surprising that legal aspects always played an important role at ENA, both as selection criteria (there is a written test dedicated to public law as part of the competitive entrance exam) and as part of the curriculum (regarding the attention paid to law). Yet, important transformation can be noticed in ENA's curriculum. First public management courses were introduced 1982 with the reform initiated by Anicet Le Pors, minister in charge of public administration and of the civil service. In the following, managerial forms of knowledge and skills have been strengthen (Bezes, 2009) and the curriculum has moved away from its original bi-disciplinary (public law and economics) structure as designed by ENA's founding fathers (Kollop et Billand, 2013: 224).

In fact, during the last two decades, French decision makers became increasingly aware of the importance of some important raising issues in the field of public management such as the shift toward the customer-based approach, results-based management, the public service being open to prosecution, the advent of new information technologies, demographic, organizational culture and human-resource management and, finally, the objective of serving an increasingly pluralistic population, in both ethnic and cultural terms. Furthermore, with European integration, there is a growing cooperation among the countries and the future of policy development is increasingly vast and complex. National administrations must work in the preparation and application of the collective decisions, and just as the other EU member states, France becomes open to the influence of public servants from other countries (Charih and alii 2006, 32).

⁴ While a majority of trainees are posted in French embassies abroad, other are hosted in European or international institutions (WTO, IMF...) or in foreign administrations such as the UK treasury or the German ministry of foreign affairs.

Adapting ENA to these changes implies the identification of the administrative competencies needed by the country in the next decades. These are linked to demographic evolution, internal (the role of the State and the public powers) and external (European and global context) transformations already underway such as decentralization, the redefinition of the scope of government action, the transfer from authoritarian relationship to contractual partnership, the increasing importance of arbitration and regulation, the building of Europe, globalization. As stated in a ground-breaking report, the qualities expected of public administrators evolve and beyond their traditional abilities (sense of what is in the general interest, integrity, power to analyse and synthesize, long-term vision ...), there is an essential need to develop new skills such as imagination, management of change, human-resource management, multilateral negotiations, risk management (Silguy report, 2003: 3). This is the reason why today, topics related to public management represent ca. 50% of the content of ENA preservice curriculum⁵. However, even these topics are very much connected to the French situation and to the specificities of the French civil service.

Exposure to other models and realities

The training program offered at ENA however doesn't solely focus on what constitutes the French public administration. ENA students become exposed to other models thanks to two particularities. The first one is the fact that beside French participants, a large part of the public enrolled in the program is made of foreign students who follow the same courses and also share the experience of internships⁶. Most of them do already have a public service experience at home. A passive exposure to foreign administrative traditions and systems occurs within this framework as well as the possibility to become aware about similar challenges and different solutions in other countries or to relativize the validity of some principles and mechanisms applied within the French context. Furthermore, as part of the curriculum for the pre service as well as for post-service professional training, pedagogical exercises are organised to compare and exchange experience between administrative systems⁷.

⁵ Examples of management issues addressed as part of the curriculum: Leading a team, human resource management and organizing social dialog, project management, crisis management, negotiation and communication, budgeting, change management (modernization process, administrative simplification and better regulation, impact assessments, introducing innovation in public services), evaluation of public policies, digital technology and e-administration.

⁶ The current share is of 30 foreigners from all over the world for 90 participants having passed the competitive examination. Whereas the last ones will enter the French civil service, the other ones will return to their home country to start or continue their career.

⁷ For pre-service training a joint study day with students from the German university of administrative science is organised almost each year. A similar exercise takes place as part of the post-service training program organised for around 40 French mid-career civil servants who will access to senior positions. During one day, they meet a group of 40 Italian senior civil servants and compare their experience with regards to common problems and challenges.

Different directions of external influence

NSPA teaching programs are not only means of reproducing the public management principles running the system, but can also become tools to introduce new ideas and instruments. The growing interdependency of French public administration to external factors makes necessary to monitor worldwide trends and phenomenon in the field of public management and policies in order to be informed about the state of the art in the field of public management and administration research and to know which are the current or up-coming successful practices and solutions for problem solving. It is mainly a matter of benchmarking and best practices. Participation into international networks dedicated to public administration issues, be it from a scientific perspective (eg. the International Institute of Administrative Sciences) or aiming at sharing experience between professionals (eg. International Association of Schools and Institutes of public administration, or the European network of directors of schools of public administration DISPA) as well as in international conferences, represent interesting forms of exposure to international trends and evolutions of public service at the international level⁸.

As a national school of public administration, ENA is not only an arena in which national or foreign students are exposed to national or international ideas and instruments of public administration. It is itself a major actor of the French strategy of influence in the field of public administration cooperation and development. With help of bilateral or multilateral partnership agreements and twinning and ad-hoc training programs or upon the occasion of, it promotes the French model and offers solutions adaptive to the local needs and expectations and by doing so, it contributes in return to the international circulation of instruments and administrative models.

⁸ It can be noticed that even when some models claim being international, such as the attempt to disseminate standards of excellence for public administration training programs (see Rosenbaum and Kauzya 2006), they are actually very much oriented to some particular contexts (in this case the US model) which raises some issues regarding the validity of the solutions promoted. Regarding the French position on this question see Larat 2015.

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