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# Introduction

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**Abstract** This book aims to offer a systematic review of the state-of-the-art knowledge about public administration in Europe produced by the European scholarly community. The first chapter describes the rationale for this endeavor, and offers an overview of the various contributions.

## 1.1 SCOPE AND CONTENT

Why a handbook on public administration and public management *in Europe*? The basic, and certainly not uncommon (see Pollitt 2013), idea is that context does matter, also in the organisation of scientific knowledge. This volume stems from the consideration that there is a need for a contribution capable of providing a systematic review of the state-of-the-art in the field of public administration that fully takes into account both the factual and the conceptual context of knowledge (Virtanen 2013). In plainer words, what this book aims to offer is a systematic review of the state-of-the-art knowledge about public administration in Europe produced by the European scholarly community—well, a subset of the European scholarly community: those who kindly accepted our invitation to contribute a chapter to this handbook (a very representative subset indeed, to whom we are very grateful, and—what matters most—of whose contribution the reader will greatly benefit). The preposition “in” before Europe qualifies both a specific place

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and time—i.e. contemporary Europe—and specific substances—the actors, the institutions, the structures and the processes of public administration and public policy, as explained by functional, cultural and structural features: this is what we refer to as the factual context of knowledge. The frames, theories, models, methods—and values—of the European scholarly community that reviews the state-of-the-art of our sapience about public administration in Europe forms what we refer to as the conceptual context of knowledge.

There is a flavour of the so-called ‘area studies’ in the approach chosen for this book. The idea is that different strands of inquiry and streams of scientific investigation around a given phenomenon (the administrative system) may be brought together around a geographical focus—i.e. applied to one specific region of the world (Europe). The knowledge of the specifics (of the broader governmental systems, broader culture(s), societies, history and geography, etc.) do matter, as it does matter recognising the specifics of the way in which the scholarly community generates and diffuses knowledge about public administration in Europe. Possibly, it does matter even more, given the double (dualistic) nature of public administration as both an applied social science (better: a subject field—the ‘State’, the ‘administrative state’—studied by multiple disciplines) and a form of practical knowledge. Public administration may be conceived as both ‘science’ and ‘art and profession’. And Europe is in the most profound sense about both. Europe is about science and the sciences (natural and social sciences) as an attitude and a way of approaching the human and the physical world in the search of the ‘causes’ of everything by means of reason only, that has originated in this region of the world. The ‘scientific approach’ has its origins in the ancient Greek civilisation, when the progenitors of contemporary Europeans conceived of philosophy as the rational knowledge and understanding—the contemplation—of reality as such: they conceived of philosophy as, in a sense, the science of reason (in Greek: λόγος, *logos*, which means ‘word’ and ‘reason’, also in the sense of the most in-depth, ultimate explanation of something: what ‘gives reason of’ something), distinguished from knowledge through imagination and action (the arts and artistic knowledge) and from knowledge through belief and faith (knowledge, notably knowledge of the divine, through religion and faith). Over the centuries, specific disciplines and sciences, with their defined field of inquiry and method, stemmed from philosophy (which continues to focus on the totality of being, on reality as such); through this lineage (the search for rational causes, according to the principle of reason), many contemporary social science approaches are indebted to the Greek civilisation: administrative sciences included (see e.g. Ongaro 2017, Chaps. 2–4). Europe is also about art and the arts, to which Europe has powerfully contributed. The art of government, the art and the profession of public administration as such, and all the professions that constitute and are embedded into public administration (from professionals of security, like policemen and military, to professionals of science, like university professors, from medics to public works engineers) also owe significantly to the contribution to the development of the arts and the professions that was produced in Europe over two and a half millennia.

There is both a strong assumption and a humble recognition at the roots of this book. The assumption is that in the field of public administration knowledge rarely takes the shape of universal laws: if such were the case, there would be no reason to limit the remit of each chapter in this book to one region of the world. However, this is (very) rarely the case (see e.g. Politt and Bouckaert 2011, Chap. 1). If knowledge is ‘contextualised’—a status which is consistent with the nature of public administration as practical knowledge, as an ‘art and profession’ alongside it being a ‘science’—then there is a need to humbly recognise the inherently limited nature of the knowledge that can be generated in the field of public administration, and to accept this qualifying trait as a starting point for moving further.

Indeed, we would argue that methodologically and substantively robust ‘local knowledge’ is the starting point for more universal, or at least universalistic in ambition, kind of knowledge. We thus hope that the projects for the development of other handbooks of public administration and public management in ‘other’ regions of the world (the reader will excuse the usage of such an ‘euro-centric’ expression, justified by the choice of topic of the book) will be elicited by this volume, and these works will together contribute to building up a platform for a dialogue among these ‘local and contextualised’ forms of knowledge, a dialogue which may potentially turn out to be the breeding ground for a universalistic kind of knowledge: a kind of knowledge that is global in the aspiration and remit and yet (mostly) contextual in nature, made mostly of middle-range theorisations though without renouncing the aspiration of attempting to develop also law-like generalisations alongside contextualised knowledge (see the discussion that Drumaux and Joyce develop in the chapter in this handbook on public leadership, strained between the delineation of contextual factors and their influence on the practice of leadership across Europe, on one hand, and the thrust of some leadership literature towards the attainment of the profiling of the defining features of the public sector leader in a ‘universalistic’ fashion, on the other hand).

Developing such a long-term dialogue is a tall task, like building an edifice capable of leaving a mark on the skyline. We hope that one small brick for building the edifice of such a lofty ambition may be provided by the collective effort of the many prominent scholars that have been willing to spend some of their time and energies to contribute to this handbook. We believe that such contextualised knowledge is highly beneficial both to readers interested in public administration, public management and public policy in and for Europe, and to readers residing or anyway focused on public administration elsewhere in the world, as comparison is centre-stage in our discipline, and good comparison requires sound and in-depth knowledge of each of the units that are compared.

What are some key traits of public administration in Europe? Here we can only hint in a very succinct way to certain characteristics that feature prominently, and sketch the lines of some potential implications for the study and practice of public administration. Such implications are more fully developed throughout the book.

Europe has historically been the breeding ground of the ‘modern’ nation state (which is at the base of the contemporary ‘Westphalian’ global order, Kissinger 2014), yet (indeed in many respects exactly because of that) it is also the birthplace of the most advanced experiment of transcending the nation state: the European Union (EU), and its associated configuration which is probably most known by the label of Multi-Level Governance. Events like the 2016 referendum held in the United Kingdom on the permanence in the EU show the challenges and complexities of building such a multi-level polity. Attempting to partly transcend the nation state presents major challenges on key issues defining political-institutional identity (like economic policy, foreign policy or migration, which represent a terrain of major challenges for the EU), with massive administrative implications. Hence, studying public administration in Europe also means exploring a distinctive supra-national space, the European administrative system (Bauer and Trondal 2015) and the distinctive phenomenon of an expanded multi-level administration. A number of chapters are devoted to multi-level administration and cross country intensive cooperation in the administrative policy field.

A plurality of administrative systems can be found throughout Europe: administrative diversity is another key trait of public administration in Europe. Whilst this is obviously a matter of degree (how much diversity, and measured how, contrasted with the extent of diversity detectable elsewhere?) rather than a distinctive property, it seems a proper depiction to refer to public administration in Europe as widely diversified. In mapping administrative traditions worldwide, two prominent scholars—Martin Painter and Guy Peters (Painter and Peters 2010)—detect as many as five distinct administrative traditions in Europe—out of a list of nine main traditions identified worldwide. Hence, it may be claimed that the study of public administration and management in Europe is comparative ‘in nature’, or as a minimum it may be safely noticed that Europe is a good place to study contextual influences on public administration and management, and to nourish the study of comparative public administration.

‘Plurality’ lies not just in the variety of administrative systems that form the object of investigation, but also in the multitude of the theoretical approaches employed by scholars operating in so many countries and writing in so many languages. Plurality and diversity are also reflected in the multiplicity of schools of thought and streams of investigation detectable across Europe, a continent which is relatively small in size and hence the variety of intellectual strands present in Europe appears even more striking (see also Raadschelders 2011).

There are also other reasons, partly historical and partly prospective, for studying public administration in Europe. If (what follows is a series of big ‘ifs’) the claim is warranted that liberal democracy is the form of political system to which to aspire, and that the Weberian bureaucracy is the ‘modern’ public administration, and that advanced capitalist economy is the ‘modern’ form of organising the economy, and that the welfare state is a (albeit challenged) form of ‘progress’, then trends in public administration and public services management in

Europe (which are, broadly speaking and though with significant exceptions, embedded in such systems) may be ‘anticipatory’ of worldwide trends and challenges—which adds to the rationale for this handbook.

We have mentioned the Weberian bureaucracy and should pause on this theme for a moment. Europe is of course also the home of Max Weber and of the ‘modern’ conception of public administration. To the extent the ‘pure’ model of Weberian bureaucracy ever existed (a long-debated issue), it was experimented in Europe, which adds to the interest of the study of public administration in Europe. This is especially the case if we consider that most contemporary reform narratives and trends in public management doctrines either originated or found fertile terrain for wide experimentation in Europe: from the New Public Management to (‘new’) Public Governance, from Neo-Weberianism (*nomen omen*) to Post-NPM configurations.

We have also mentioned above that Europe is the birthplace of the welfare state (in its various and differentiated forms, very different when moving from the North to the South of Europe), and we should add that it appears to be the epicentre of most of the major challenges the welfare state is facing in the contemporary economies and societies: slowing economic growth rates (which make the resource-devouring welfares so difficult to sustain), an ageing population (putting huge pressures on welfare services), massive migration flows (eliciting form of identity politics in indigenous populations and issues of equality of access and distribution of resources), and so on. The welfare in Europe is a major area of policy concern, and of research. As a large chunk of public services are welfare-related, knowledge about the governance and delivery of such services ‘under pressure’ is a major area of interest where European experiences may turn out to be extremely valuable.

Last but not least, Europe is where the ‘modern’ notions of tolerance/toleration and the laity of the state were first conceived and applied: the separation of state and religion, which does not mean religion and faith cannot have a public and political space (an example are the Christian democratic parties that have been and/or are active in the political arena in a number of European countries), but this occurs without impinging on the separation of state and religion. Hence, studying public administration in Europe is about studying the challenges of effecting and ‘administering’ equal rights and duties (the rights of the human being, and the rights of the citizen, nowadays stretched between multiple nationalities and a partial, in-becoming EU citizenship) in an open and pluralist society which is in manifold respects under siege.

Finally, most of the governmental systems in Europe are parliamentary, differently from other regions of the world, like the mainly Presidential governmental systems that can be found across the Americas, or the varied systems detectable across Africa and Asia. This is a specific standpoint on the topic of public accountability, and the varied arrangements across Europe are therefore worth exploring, also to the benefit of non-European thinkers—academics and practitioners alike.

## 1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The handbook is structured into five main parts. The first one presents some introductory chapters on key issues about the study and the practice of public administration in Europe. Firstly, a chapter is devoted to the nature of doing research on public administration in Europe, by delving into the different traditions and approaches to researching PA across Europe. Secondly and equally important, a chapter explores the teaching of public administration across Europe, thereby encompassing both the training of practitioners and that of academics in the disciplinary field. Thirdly, plurality of languages is a key trait of Europe, and a chapter explores the usage of some key words of public administration in many languages across Europe (in the English language these are words like *governance*, *accountability* or *performance*): language shapes thought, and language diversity is a key trait of public administration, public management and public policy across Europe. The role of learned societies active in the field is not directly addressed here, as there are other books for this purpose (see e.g. Ongaro 2018, a collective work occasioned by the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the European Group for Public Administration—EGPA—and collating a very wide range of contributions from all over Europe about the history and the role of EGPA in the development of the administrative sciences and the practice of public administration in Europe).

Against the background of decades of ‘public sector reforms’, Part 2 sets out to delve into a range of public *management* topics in and from a European perspective: a selection of themes that we deem to be of central significance for understanding ‘how to get public organisations and services to run (in some sense) better’ (one definition of public management, see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004/2011). This part provides the reader with a state-of-the-art knowledge of themes ranging from strategic management and leadership to human resources management in public services organisations, from financial management and accounting to performance management and users satisfaction, from branding to e-government, from human resources management and motivation of public servants, to network management and governance. Well-known topics like accountability are discussed from a new angle, while new topics like procurement and negotiation make their way into the study of public administration and management. Importantly, the part reflects critically on the transformations occurred to the management of public services, highlighting continuity as well as change, both in the practice of public management (what has happened in the reality of the public services ‘out there’) and in the way in which the European scholarly community theorises about it. The various chapters on collaboration, coproduction, public–private partnerships and networks reflect the important role of these concepts in public administration research in Europe (cf. the next chapter on research traditions).

Part 3 further broadens the perspective on our disciplinary field and elaborates on a wide range of ‘traditional’ *public policy and administration*

topics in a European perspective. The reader can revisit classic themes at the interconnection between public administration and public policy, like agenda setting, policy implementation and evaluation. Alongside it, a range of newer themes are delved into: from policy learning to comparative regulatory regimes in Europe, from the management of risk and blame to policy and administrative coordination, from social innovation to the implications of ‘EU citizenship’ for the administration of public services.

Part 4 discusses public administration and public management in Europe from different perspectives. For example, a number of chapters take a geographical comparative perspective, comparing for example North and South, or looking into Central Eastern European public administration and management research. Other chapters discuss the contribution provided by a range of academic disciplines to public administration as an inter-disciplinary applied field: law, economics, political science, organisation science. A chapter on the legacy of Max Weber puts public administration and management research into a more historic perspective, while other chapters focus on the succession (or layering according to other interpretations) of reform narratives like the New Public Management, New Public Governance, Neo-Weberianism, and relatively more recent developments like the long-term impact of the multiple crises (financial, economic and fiscal) on public management and public services in Europe. Such a time orientation also enables authors to draw lessons from previous research to help us improve current theories and methods; see for example the chapters on the philosophical underpinnings of public administration, or the chapters on the use of surveys and case studies or the rise of the behavioural approach and the application of experiments.

Finally, various chapters in this part also examine different levels of government, in particular the multi-level governance of and within the European Union. Topics include the configuration of public institutions and administration in Europe (institutionally from the administration of the EU and multi-level administration to the local/regional levels of governance, and geographically across the different traditions and systems in Europe) and the influence of the EU on national administrations.

The concluding chapters (Part 5) serve some additional specific purposes. Two chapters discuss the interrelations between science and practice, and how research results are translated into practical advice and knowledge, and how such knowledge can be included in new policy decisions. The final chapter presents an overview of the handbook and deduces a number of challenges for future research, in Europe and outside.

We hope that readers, both those studying public administration—students and scholars alike—and those practising the management of public services in their professional life, will benefit from this journey through the complexity—and the richness—of public administration in Europe.



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