

Action IS0601

Comparative Research into Current Trends in Public sector Organization (CRIPO)

ISCH



Participating countries: AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IL, IT, LT, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, UK

Chair of the Action: Geert Bouckaert, BE, geert.bouckaert@soc.kuleuven.be

COST Science Officer: Julia Stamm, jstamm@cost.esf.org

<http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/cost/>

Working Group 1: Autonomy, control and organizational performance

New trends changing the structuring and functioning of the public sector are observed. Specialization within large bureaucracies results in the establishment of autonomous 'agencies' and new ways of contract-based result control. There remains lack of scientific proof of the beneficial effects of these trends for the performance of the public sector. Most research efforts suffer from a lack of internationally comparative data, longitudinal data, and ill-concerted research methods. This proposal resolves these drawbacks by bringing together scholars on a European platform for comparative and longitudinal research, studying the autonomy, control and performance of individual semi-autonomous public sector organizations, the evolutions over time, the causes and explanations for these changes and their effects. The research teams use all kinds of methods, both quantitative and qualitative: surveys, interviews, case studies, document analysis, etc. A common questionnaire is developed. Because of its standardization it will allow integration of datasets and improve possibilities for comparative research on autonomy, control and organizational performance.

Working Group 2: Proliferation, coordination and systemic performance

The trend towards agencification and specialization increases the need for new coordination tools. The proliferation of autonomous public sector organizations, which are only linked through contracts is perceived to have resulted into a general loss of macro control of the governmental apparatus. The separation of policy design and implementation, as well as the disconnection between policy fields, is believed to make the implementation of 'whole-of-government' and cross-cutting issues much more difficult. Whereas in earlier days the co-ordination went via the hierarchical chain, we now observe an increasing reliance on quasi-market-like co-ordination mechanisms (such as the introduction of competition) and network-like co-ordination mechanisms in order to co-ordinate actions of autonomized public sector organizations. However, the effectiveness of these new co-ordination mechanisms is severely questioned. This working group studies how groups of public sector organizations are coordinated and coordinate among themselves, describes evolutions, causes and effects on the performance of policy sectors.

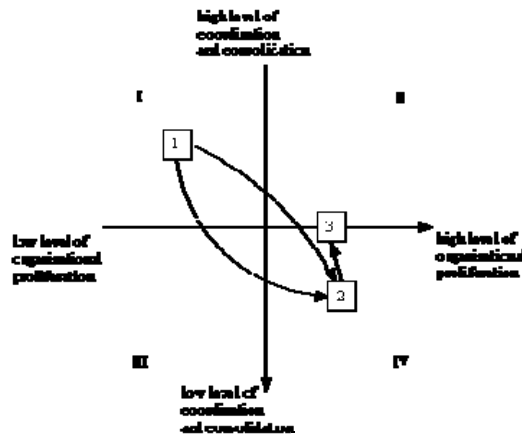


Figure 1: Specialisation and coordination in OECD Countries – a simple scheme

Objectives:

- **Innovative and interdisciplinary fundamental research.** Given the recent scientific interest in public sector organization, sharing fundamental research experiences on a large scale cross-national forum will be highly innovative and unique in the field of public management.
- **Usability of research results for practitioners, supporting evidence-based policies.** More specifically, guidelines for tools, checklists and criteria will be developed and proposed in order to assist policy-makers and civil servants in developing their policies on public sector modernisation.
- **Developing a Trans-European perspective on public sector organization.**
- **Engagement and mobility of young and gender-balanced researchers.**

Main Achievements:

- Assessment of the state of the art: comparison of research notes of each country.
- First level comparison of existing data: Each country team produced notes on methodologies and results of current research. These notes are reviewed, discussed and compared in order to draw lessons and feed a more general discussion. These reviews will review theories, methodologies and results with respect to the different research questions (what, why and effects).
- Development of upgrading strategies: Based on review of current methodological experiences, there is a discussion of further development of methodology. Emphasis is on the draft of case study formats and the common questionnaire, in order to develop common cross-national databases.