

*Call for Papers*

**About time: looking back, taking stock and thinking about the future of agencification processes**

EGPA Study Group on Governance of Public Sector Organizations  
Conference of the European Group of Public Administration (EGPA)

7-10 September 2010, Toulouse, France

“Temporalities, Public Administration and Public Policy”

The EGPA Study Group on Governance of Public Sector Organizations studies aspects of public sector organizations. Our focus is on public sector organizations of different forms, ranging from semi-independent governmental units to different types of ‘agencies’, state-owned companies and government foundations. Central issues under study are the establishment, change (and dissolution) of these organizations, different characteristics of different forms of organizations, their design, governance, management and control, and their performance. Furthermore, these organizations interact with a complex (multi-level) network of actors, consisting of for example parliament, ministers and ministries, subnational and international government organizations, regulators, other agencies, interest groups, courts and civil society. The quality, frequency and type of interactions can be studied, as well as the consequences for all parties involved.

In line with the theme of the EGPA conference we will pay special attention to the variable ‘time’ in public sector organization research. This can be done in three ways.

First, we can look back at the history of the reforms that led to the creation of different types of public organizations. Western governments initiated the first reforms known as New Public Management in the 1980s. One of these reforms concerned the disaggregation of units from the traditional government bureaucracy. This led to the establishment of large numbers of semi-autonomous ‘agencies’ in all kinds of (legal) forms and shapes. Next to reconstructing the trajectories of these reforms, it can be questioned to which extent these new agencies were indeed new. In countries like the Netherlands, existing forms of arms’ length bodies were revitalized. Their number went sky high in a short span of time. In other countries like Norway, semi-autonomous agencies were already the main form of governance, used both for policy advice and service delivery. So, how does the proliferation of ‘agencies’ fit into a broader historical context?

The first reforms were followed by other reforms. The sharp increase in the number of agencies led to a hot political debate when it became clear that the (democratic) accountability for many of these organizations was poorly regulated (see e.g. the UK). Repairs were undertaken, leading the re-shuffling of existing agencies, the design of new types of agencies with more control possibilities and the appointment of new regulatory agencies. As these reforms were added onto existing structures, the agency-landscape became even more fragmented and complicated. Later interventions like ‘whole of government’, post-NPM and ‘joined-up government’ aimed to restore coordination, but without letting go of existing forms of agencification. To which extent

are these new reforms indeed improvements, and which effects have they had so far both in terms of performance and for democracy?

Second, we can study the lifecycle of public sector organizations. As a result of the 'sedimentation' of reforms, many agencies have experienced a number of changes throughout their lifetime; they have been merged, split up, redefined, and so on. Their governance and control has been changed as well; governments have created new guidelines and regulations to enable ministers to intervene, and to make agencies more accountable. And as agencies have matured, they have implemented reforms in their own organizations as well, for example by introducing new management techniques and new accountability instruments. All these changes have impacted on agency autonomy as well. Some studies even point to an 'emancipation' of agencies as they have become detached from the government more and more, engaging in new (commercial) activities and focusing more on other stakeholders besides the parent minister. Other studies point to the absence of real changes and state that the new agencies are in fact a rediscovery of bureaucratic and Weberian values and orientations. These changes in the lifecycle of agencies can be studied (longitudinally, by case studies), to reveal how much and which changes have taken place and which effects they have had for example on their performance and (democratic) accountability.

Third, an assessment can be made of the outcomes of the creation of public sector organizations so far. Three decades after the first agencies were set up, western governments face a complex constellation of agencies that carry out tasks like regulation, service delivery, policy implementation, quasi-judicature, and so on. Agency models have also spread to developing and transitional countries, where nowadays similar patterns of sedimentation, agency variety and complex networks of organizations can be found. To what results have these reforms brought us? How are different types of specialization affecting their way of working? How do they handle cross-cutting issues, like geo-hazards (climate change, epidemia); internal security and migration, and welfare administration? Such policy issues face the problem of coordination between several actors at several levels and sectors, with a huge involvement of autonomous agencies at all levels.

The Study Group aims at expanding its boundaries by inviting researchers from public administration and other disciplines like management research, organisation studies, and public enterprise studies to its meetings.

Papers can be descriptive or explanatory, but they should have a clear conceptual and theoretical basis and meet the normal methodological standards for research.

Comparative papers (across time, countries, government levels or policy sectors) are particularly welcomed.

## **Practicalities**

The permanent Study Group will aim for publication of high-quality papers in special issues of peer-reviewed journals, as well as creating possibilities for the publication of single papers. Study Group website: <http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/egpa/org/index.htm>

Practical information on the EGPA 2010 conference, and the other study groups: <http://www.egpa2010.com>.

Please submit a short abstract outlining the title of the paper; a short description of the contents of the paper; the research method of your contribution, and the empirical material to be used, name, affiliation, and contact information of the author(s) (maximum one page).

The deadline for the abstracts is **May 1st, 2010**. Final acceptance will be notified by mid May 2010. Final papers are due by 7th September 2010.

Papers will be made available on the Study Group Website. Paper presenters will be expected to prepare a short presentation and to act as a discussant for at least one other paper.

Please e-mail paper proposals in .doc, or .rtf format to the study group convenors:

Prof.dr. Per Laegreid  
Department of Administration and Organization Theory /Rokkan Centre  
University of Bergen  
Christiegt. 17  
5007 Bergen  
Norway  
Tel.:+47/ 5558 2553  
Fax: +47/ 5558 9890  
[per.lagreid@aorg.uib.no](mailto:per.lagreid@aorg.uib.no)

Dr. Koen Verhoest  
Public Management Institute  
KULeuven  
Van Evenstraat 2 A  
3000 Leuven  
Tel. +32 / (0)16 32 32 70  
Fax. +32/ (0) 16 32 32 67  
[koen.verhoest@soc.kuleuven.be](mailto:koen.verhoest@soc.kuleuven.be)

Dr. Sandra van Thiel  
Erasmus University Rotterdam  
Public Administration  
P.O. Box 1738  
3000 DR Rotterdam  
The Netherlands  
Tel. +31 10 4082140  
Fax. +31 10 4089099  
[vanthiel@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:vanthiel@fsw.eur.nl)