The Survey: A Long-Distance Conversation about the Future of Public Administration in Europe

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1 The EPPA survey

As explained in the introduction, we started our own “soul-searching” exercise about the current state and future challenges of Public Administration by looking at what had been done by our predecessors, in both Europe and the US (see 1.3 in the previous chapter). But we soon found that we needed a more comprehensive and unconventional way to take stock of current concerns, expectations and new approaches. Starting with a large general debate at a conference did not seem to be very helpful, so we decided to start with a broad qualitative survey with mainly open questions.

The idea was to get an overview of the perceptions concerning the future challenges for Public Administration over the next 20 years from a wide range of scholars and teachers across Europe. As previously mentioned, 20 years seemed to be a good period, neither too far in the future nor too close to current difficulties, so the perspective we asked for was from 1995 to 2035. In contrast to other surveys conducted within the Public Administration community in Europe, which mainly focused on the relevance of journals, academic output and prestige, and on the relationship between the disciplines of Public Administration and targeting senior-level academics (see Curry et al., 2014 and the very detailed surveys in Germany carried out by Bauer and Becker, 2017ff ), our survey aimed to capture the varied perceptions held by senior and early-stage scholars on a wide range of future challenges, as expressed in their own words. The open-question design was intended to allow us to get a more comprehensive, fair indication of what our peers and colleagues define as their main concerns, and especially to find out their reactions, suggestions and solutions to future challenges, compared to the
more standard procedure of closed, multiple-choice questions and answers. From the beginning, we were more interested in innovative ideas and honest opinions, rather than just the general views of the average PA scholar.

The first draft of a set of questions and questionnaire design was prepared at the beginning of 2015 and tested on a small sample of international colleagues in July 2015. After this pre-test, we decided to refine the questions and start each of our main areas of interest for future challenges: futures, disciplines, cultures and practice, with a clear thesis of our own, asking our respondents whether they agreed, and if not, why not. We ended up with 23 open questions, seven closed questions (yes/no or multiple choice with the option to add comments), and five additional questions about the personal background of each participant.

For our survey, we decided to target members of the European Group of Public Administration (EGPA) and participants who attended its 2015 Annual Conference in Toulouse, France. It was not easy to get an overview, or even decide through objective criteria, which respondents belonged to the population of researchers and teachers seriously engaged in Public Administration. Therefore we settled on the criteria of “self-selection.” We assumed that scholars who joined EGPA and/or its Annual Conference were at least moderately interested in the field, its problems and future development, and might therefore be interested in answering our questions. Furthermore, EGPA has been the only platform for almost 45 years that enables colleagues from all over Europe to connect with each other. After selecting the sample questions, the survey was adapted as a web-based questionnaire. The technical implementation was outsourced to A&O Consulting Oppermann, a small research company in Potsdam.

Following the EGPA Conference on 28 August 2015, the questionnaire was sent to about 500 contacts. After two reminders, 162 had started and 68 completed the survey. The majority of the respondents (75%) were senior academics, teaching and researching PA at the level of professor (full and assistant), another 15% held a PhD, and 10% were PhD candidates. About one-third had been in the field since 1995 or longer, but still, at least to some extent, we can draw conclusions about the perceptions of the future generation of Public Administration scholars and teachers. The academic backgrounds of respondents were quite diverse, with the majority coming from Political Science and Public Administration, 12% from Management and about 10% from Law. Overall, they came from about ten different European countries.

The survey was obviously not representative, but invited participants to comment on a number of (more or less) controversial statements about the
development of our field. It therefore allowed for a qualitative and discursive analysis of essential positions and contradictions. The raison d’être of our undertaking was to get a broad range of views and to map central concerns and perspectives as comprehensively as possible. Our aim was to start a discussion and not to summarise it, so we were therefore more interested in the diversity and variety of different views held and the major arguments for a changing field of Public Administration. Since we had received, as we had hoped, a large number of written answers and comments to our open questions (usually the length of a paragraph or more), our approach was more similar to a collection of semi-structured interviews than to a quantitative survey (see also Jansen 2011), and much more a conversation than a questionnaire.

To analyse and understand the wide-ranging collection of answers, ideas and concerns we used MAXQDA software for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis. The software helped us to organise and search relevant information in our data using a number of different, specifically developed codes and concepts, and we were thus able to retrieve much more contextual and supplementary information than would have been possible with simple quotations or word counts. We present these findings as a kind of “collage of quotes” that represent the amazing variety of views and concerns, and which should depict a unique picture of our field at the same time.

2 The Results

2.1 The “grand” challenges for Public Administration as a scholarly field

The first question we asked was a very general and somewhat suggestive one: will Public Administration as an academic field of research and teaching look very different in 2035 from how it was in 1995? The objective was to find out whether our colleagues expect major changes in our field over the next 20 years.

More than 85% of our respondents expected PA to change. The following is an example of a typical response:

“Much of what we accepted as collective wisdom in the 1960s was being challenged in the 1990s and again the views of the 80s and 90s are under increasing scrutiny. The field cannot possibly stagnate.”
However, 15% of our colleagues did not expect any major changes, and the reasons they gave are interesting and thought-provoking (we have put together quotations from different respondents to present the major arguments):

“Of course there will be differences (mainly in the eGov direction, transparency), but I am afraid that human character will not progress so much that we could talk about a very large difference. — Handling politics and production of complex services will not change qualitatively. — The object of what and how we seek to explain public management phenomena will not fundamentally change. — Contemporary western democracy has proven to be a durable institutional framework (…) And I don’t see that being fundamentally challenged in Europe, consequently the context and values of PA won’t either. Instead they will simply turn in circles: market, community, authority.”

Here an important caveat for change is hinted at, the conservative and stabilising effect of institutions, which sometimes gets lost in the dominating concern with administrative reforms, which has been the hallmark of academic PA, and especially Public Management for many years (Hood, 1991; Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). It has been observed before that there has been for some time a lack of appreciation for the inertia of institutions, social structures and established ways of life, as well as an overly generous and optimistic view of the capacity of governments and/or leaders for change. But on the other hand, with the rise of populism and anti-liberal movements all over Europe, this is perhaps somewhat too optimistic. Maybe the world has already changed since 2015, when we conducted our survey.

One of our colleagues summed up this optimistic view and hinted at some of the changes, which we still have to expect and to deal with, and which are further developed and discussed in the following responses:

“I think the field will largely address the same fundamental and practical issues as we do today (and have done for over 100 years), but the availability of data will be better and the demands for scientific rigor will be higher.”

2.1.1 Challenges for PA research
Our findings reveal that better and more data as well as more scientific rigour are among the main challenges that PA research will face over the next 20 years. As we had not expected, respondents expressed less concern about problems of theory or theoretical foundations, relationships with practice, new substantive challenges, even if all of them play a role, and more concern about the methodological foundations of our research. Typical comments were:
“To make the field more methodological robust; a lot of research findings nowadays in EU PA are rather anecdotal than robust — many [of our] arguments lack extensive empirical support — methodological advancement (qualitative and quantitative) — produce credible causal evidence of our claims. Our main problem today is that very little public policy is shaped by insights from PA.”

Looking more closely at methodological challenges – and opportunities – *big data* is mentioned most often:

“New European databases coming online are superior to anything else out there — information transparency of the public sector as basis for empirical research — to make better use of data which are produced by administrations and to cooperate with the public sector in this endeavour — collecting ‘Big Data’, that will in time be internationally comparable — to understand how to use internet and ‘big data’ for PA research.”

Areas also mentioned in this regard, but much less frequently, were on the one hand the use of *experiments*, so here PA is also following mainstream social sciences:

“We need to make experiments our main tool of investigation in order to produce causal claims that in a credible way can inform public policy — We need to provide our students with a much strong ability to apply quantitative research designs and experimental methods.”

and a classical concern to carry out more advanced and informed *comparative research* on the other hand:

“Finding a common base for comparative research — create conditions facilitating continued, high quality comparative work. — Take comparative PA research to a new level (away from country case studies to more advanced statistical methods) — Strengthening comparative researches, starting big research project that involves groups from different countries”.

Another important issue raised was the long-standing problem of *interdisciplinarity*:

“The next big challenge is placing decision-making into more scientific frames, with the more interdisciplinary view — cross fertilization with
other disciplines — developing PA (...) interdisciplinary and not (only) multidisciplinary, (which is) usually even asymmetric with one discipline too dominating, regardless of being policy analysis, law, management etc. — we (will) need to collaborate much more closely with other disciplines outside of social sciences in addressing issues of governance, especially as we start to acknowledge the complexity in addressing societal challenges (e.g. security, climate change and its social consequences, mobility, poverty, demographic changes, ...)

The last comment lists the main challenges already addressed in our survey. Migration is very often mentioned, along with other major issues of great societal concern, such as climate change, demography, poverty and security, among others. Austerity was also mentioned, but not so frequently, and interestingly very often with concerns about less funding for universities, students and research, indicating a problem which our respondents have personally and directly experienced.

Overall, these results correspond with the findings of the COCOPS (Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future) academic survey on European Public Administration indicating that, according to senior-level scholars, Public Administration should become more “internationally comparative” and more “interdisciplinary” (Curry et al., 2014, 28–29). Furthermore, our results show that the emphasis on newly developing social problems as challenges for PA research is about the same as the attention paid to more general theoretical concerns. Typical responses about the challenges were:

“Strengthen the theoretical base — More emphasis should be given to theoretical and philosophical study to earn a more respectable status in basic research — The challenges are improving theory building and connecting the discipline to broader theories in sociology as well as political theory (e.g. rationalism, structuralism or post-foundationalism) — In terms of theory we must be more open to the broader social sciences – in particular cognitive and social psychology”.

While most of these comments point towards greater interdisciplinarity, also in theoretical directions, others disagreed:

“We need to stop to import theories (...) from other fields, and place a greater emphasis on developing and refining PA theories, of both context and behaviour within and vis-à-vis public organizations”.

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“We need to stop to import theories (...) from other fields, and place a greater emphasis on developing and refining PA theories, of both context and behaviour within and vis-à-vis public organizations”.
And there were also some relevant messages of warning:

“However, our (...) task as researcher is not getting carried away with fashionable topics. The last point can be done by testing theories, replication of research and to slow down the growth of new concepts (in other words: not coming up with a new concept but trying to embed our research in more broad theoretical streams).”

Finally, with about the same frequency, challenges concerning the relationship between research and practice were mentioned:

“Bringing practitioners and researchers together and make research relevant for practitioners — Dissemination [of research] into practice — Reinforcing the dialogue with practitioners”.

Apart from these well-known claims, balancing “rigour and relevance” is seen by some of our colleagues as a much more demanding challenge. “Contrasting demands of the world of practice and academia” are identified, and keeping an “arm’s length distance in respect to practical public administration, politics and business interests” is called for. Finally, the demands of the modern academic world may work against this ideal of practical relevance:

“Maintaining a tight coupling between research and practice and pursuing intellectual innovation is challenged by the incentive systems in the academic world (the need to publish to progress in academic career, and the need to repeat already expressed arguments in order to be published) pushing towards decoupling and conservatism.”

To sum up, the main challenges for PA research identified by our respondents are made all the more surprising by the range of issues hardly mentioned, if at all, compared to the ones most often cited. Most common was the concern for more methodological awareness and rigour. Of lesser importance, but still quite frequently stated, were concerns about interdisciplinarity, theoretical foundations and practical relevance. By contrast, much less emphasis was placed on the classical concerns of Public Management, such as performance and efficiency. These were cited by some of our respondents, but even less than political concerns, such as democracy, participation and diversity. Although a number of our participants have a legal background, issues relating to public law and public administration were seldom mentioned.
2.1.2 Challenges for PA teaching

We also asked our respondents about the main challenges PA teaching will face over the next 20 years. The most common concern here was the attractiveness of our programmes for potential and talented students on the one hand, and the attractiveness of the public sector and public management as promising career options on the other. The main concerns were, for example:

“The attractiveness of the discipline of PA for talented students — to attract talented and motivated persons to undertake a full training (MPA, PhD) — PA is often regarded as dusty. We need to place greater emphasis on its great relevance, especially with regard to solving the most hard-pressing topics facing EU societies nowadays. Why do we leave the debate about nudging to economists and psychologists, for example?”

At the same time:

“Degrees in public administration do not seem to be appealing for students, today. In some countries, a career in public administration is not considered as a good opportunity for different reasons: governments are cutting expenditures (recruitment is limited) and often public administration is de-legitimized (not dynamic, difficult careers, not meritocratic but bureaucratic, difficult to develop new ideas...).”

As one colleague summed it up, our main challenges therefore are:

“— to attract the brightest students to the field;
— to prepare students for the working life;
— to become better at convincing governments they should hire PA graduates”.

All three challenges are interrelated. If we do not convince bright students to study PA, or if they do not gain practical knowledge, we will not be attractive for potential employers. However, if career opportunities in the public sector are slim or not seen as overly attractive, it becomes harder to attract bright students. This may help to explain some obvious differences in Europe. In countries where job opportunities in the public sector are attractive, such as in the Scandinavian countries, Public Administration as a field of study and research is attracting bright students and thriving.
What can we do? We seem to be creating some of the problems for ourselves, which has something to do with our own incentive systems:

“The quality of teaching is under pressure with incentive systems rewarding research over teaching (no one makes career anymore by being a good lecturer) (….) [The] ‘value’ of teaching needs to be increased in comparison to other outputs (articles, research & third party funds). (…) Otherwise quality of teaching may not be secure since there are no incentives to focus more on teaching”.

Apart from this, there was generally a lack of consensus about which direction we should take. With regard to our curricula, the same challenges and cleavages which were discussed concerning research strategies were stressed again. While some participants argued that we need more interdisciplinarity and more methodological rigour, others saw the solution in stronger disciplinary self-reliance. And at the same time, while most agreed that our success in teaching depends on being relevant for both practitioners and future academics, it was not clear how to achieve this. Here are some contradictory suggestions:

- “Getting insights on governance [from] other disciplines (…) as well as getting (…) our own students to address other disciplines — We need better integration with the broader social sciences. We need to provide our students with a much stronger ability to apply quantitative research designs and experimental methods — Becoming methodologically more advanced while at the same time creating sufficient theoretical foundation (not merely data-driven)”.

- “Public Administration Research and Teaching Network have to invest in (…) a new culture of Public Administration. I mean that Research and Teaching Network, universities and other teaching Institution, individuals, researchers and professors should focus less on abstract frameworks, methodology rigor, techniques — Teaching needs to spend more efforts on public governance, stakeholder interests and mediating forces in society; Teaching needs to give less focus in rationalistic maximizing performance tools”.

- “The (…) challenge is to maintain [our] own specificity and identity because the interdisciplinary approach determines an evaporation of frameworks — Development of [a] distinctively EU public administration theory and methods of inquiry, rather than one that follows (normally) US models — defending [ourselves] as a unique area of research (and not only being part of political science, law, economics…) – showing the relevance of Public Administration to students”.
– “There is an increasing decline of public administration, public policy and public management teaching programmes (...) Students are opting for generic management degrees. The challenge for public administration is [to] enliven the discipline and engage with the practitioner communities on the relevance of public administration scholarship,” but we have “a poor track-record of the field in showing its merits and influence.”

Several participants stressed that we should be more concerned with “ethics, diversity, and social equity,” but as one of our colleagues warned us:

“Public values (...) should be at the heart of our teaching. And we will find that we do not agree on what the core Public Values should be”.

“The main challenge is to establish the credibility of public administration teaching so that the numbers of civil servants and public managers taking university courses in public administration rises steadily year by year, and does so because the courses are seen to be worthwhile investments in the capabilities of the public sector in all European countries”.

We can probably all agree on these concerns, but the question of how to achieve this is still elusive and has therefore marked the starting point for our seminar series on disciplines, futures, cultures and practice.

2.2 Disciplines – fragmentation not necessarily a bad thing?

Our first substantive questions centred on the many disciplines of Public Administration. We invited participants to comment on the following sweeping assertion:

In recent years, disciplinary barriers and silos (e.g. between political science, management, law, etc.) within Public Administration have become ever more imperative and impregnable and have intensified established misunderstandings in the field.

About 60% of our respondents tended to agree and this, of course, implies that about 40% disagreed. We received some interesting and relevant comments.

“PA is and always will be a multidisciplinary field, it is one of the major strengths of the field — the barriers between the different disciplines are shrinking — much of the field has developed positively by incorporating many relevant theories from economics, management, organisation theory,
sociology etc. in recent years — there has been a convergence between disciplines, and PA is at the forefront here — there are a growing number of PA conferences to which people from Law, Management, Political Science now present work”.

Our survey is not representative; therefore we cannot determine how many of our colleagues share this optimistic view, but obviously not everybody is dissatisfied. There is evidence that PA research and teaching have embraced and even enhanced mainstream social science theories and concepts in recent years, much more than it used to be the case (this is also the conclusion of a state-of-the-art report about Political Science and Public Administration in Germany: see Bogumil, Jann and Nullmeier, 2006). Maybe the situation in Europe is even more promising than elsewhere, as at least two of our respondents observe:

“while I agree [to the original assertion of more fragmentation], this is less so in Europe than in the US — certainly in the US public administration and political science operate as adversaries especially in the sub-field of public policy”.

There can be no doubt that specialisation and, following from that, fragmentation are typical results of academic professionalisation and success: the more research and teaching the more specialisation. Our next questions thus asked how we should deal with these developments, and how we can enhance learning and collaboration across disciplines. First of all, nearly all of our respondents agreed that specialisation is necessary and even welcome:

“We cannot avoid specialization; we should rather avoid fragmentation — The pursuit of specialized and depth of knowledge is not the problem, but rather it is the presumption that other viewpoints are invalid that is the problem. Only when faculties accept the notion that both depth and breadth of knowledge are needed can we get past the emphases on silos of knowledge — we need both specialization and fragmentation, but we need also coordination and generalists”.

But how do we achieve and strengthen breadth of knowledge, coordination and generalists? Here, the main answer is, not very surprising for students of organisations, institutionalisation:
“In the structure and power distribution of the academy, we need strong institutions centred on PA (schools of PA, university departments, institutes, research centres), counteracting the trend (…) towards PA scholars being in a relatively marginalised position within academic loci dominated by disciplines (law, economics, political science), disciplines which are sources for PA research, but in themselves may tend to dominate and confine PA to a marginal field of application. It is very important to foster and grow a strong sense of community in scholars (and practitioners) of PA all over Europe.”

Traditional “cross-disciplinary collaborations and joined enterprises – shared conferences, guest journal editorships drawn from other disciplines – providing cross-disciplinary publications and scholarly outlets to encourage works going beyond specialization and fragmentation” are mentioned several times, but this is probably not enough. We need to create “organizational incentives to multidisciplinary perspectives, e.g. through the creation of multidisciplinary research organisations with a focus on the public sector” and a “strong core.”

Here again, practical concerns and teaching could form the nucleus of these kinds of centres:

“The meeting point lies in teaching — The major instrument of institutionalisation of our discipline is education, study programmes. The main focus should be in the integrative role of Public Administration. Instead of multidisciplinary programmes where each discipline uses its own disciplinary autonomy without much collaboration between teachers, there should be more INTER-disciplinarity where the structure comes from Public Administration (e.g., strategy, HRM, performance, coordination, governance) but other disciplines (psychology, political science, economics, law) approach the theme from their point of view. In a way, a matrix structure of themes of Public Administration and contribution from other disciplines (…) Public Administration should lead the contribution coming from other disciplines because Public Administration is the owner of the programme.”

Our next question focused on learning across established disciplinary boundaries. How can we create and enhance new forms of cooperation? Here two main approaches were proposed, and the major barriers that need to be overcome are “terminology and methodology.” Taking terminology first:
“Collaboration is hindered first by language and labels. We fail to see that similar (yet different) research is going on in other disciplines, in part because we label theories that are quite similar with different names. We miss the common threads and end up arguing about the label rather than the core ideas. — Concepts already used in other contexts are considered as new (...) simply because literature from another field of study was not considered — sometimes we use apparently similar concepts with different technical meanings and aims”.

But there were also warning messages that we should “slow down the growth of new concepts (in other words, not come up with a new concept, but try to embed our research in more broad theoretical streams).” The other obstacle to collaboration and mutual learning (3.1 see above) arises from the different methods used:

“Give up on the concept of specific PA theories and methods and instead embrace a broad application of the methods and theories available to the social sciences. — Discussion about the methods used in (...) different fields and how they can complement each other. — Working across disciplines implies to work with multiple methods and theories. An important element in a strategy would be to enhance the quality of qualitative research – in order to have conversations about methods which are open for mutual learning.”

Finally, obstacles that the academic system has created for itself, especially regarding academic publishing, are again mentioned a couple of times:

“A powerful force for segmentation however is the impact factor calculation in journals. Those with more narrow disciplinary scopes seem to have higher values. — Change the American dominated journal based assessment and reward system that predominates and public management is enslaved within — the myopic and entrenched peer system needs to come down — use reviewers from different sub-disciplines to ensure discussion between the sub-fields.”

Additionally, we asked which disciplines are crucial for the research and teaching of Public Administration, and which disciplines need to play a more dominant role before 2035 (a normative question). The answers were not very surprising, but at least confirmed established “stakeholders.”
### Table 1  Crucial Disciplines

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<th>Rank</th>
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<td>Political Science</td>
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It should be noted that the differences between the two “top dogs” (political science and management science) are rather small, just as they also are between the “second tiers” (law, sociology and economics). “Also rans” were, amongst others, psychology, history and anthropology, which each were ranked several times, but only psychology and history made it into the list of the need for “more prominent disciplines” in the future. Particularly interesting is the fate of law, which is given even less relevance for the future. This is probably an artefact because our respondents come mainly from Northern and Anglo-Saxon Europe.

#### 2.3 Futures

The next substantive questions in our survey were aimed at helping us identify future perspectives in the field of Public Administration and about how we, as a discipline, should react in facing the future. Again, we started this part of our survey questionnaire with a terse provocative statement:

*Public Administration is stuck in short-term problem and solution thinking. We need utopias and dystopias.*

About half of the survey participants commented on our statement, and their responses can be roughly divided into two, with about half agreeing and half disagreeing. Examples of comments stressing the importance of integrating the future, utopia and dystopia in PA research were:
“Utopias and dystopias allow to get out from this short–term thinking by having a broader perspective and enrich creativity. — Short-term problem solving is important, but we must not lose long–term perspectives. Dreams may be an engine to improve society, if they are well managed — (...) we need analytically informed research about futures”.

But the second half of comments revealed how concerned some respondents are about a potential decline in the relevance of short-term problem solving and solution thinking in the field of Public Administration. Typical comments were:

“Short term is needed and fitting for today’s society. We often do not act fast and short term enough — We need better theory and testing, not stories – Great theories are for the ivory tower. “

Even though our survey does not claim to be representative, these contradictory comments to our introductory statement hint at two dichotomous spectrums in PA research strategies. While some of our colleagues are convinced that short-term problem solving is important above all else, other PA scholars expressed the need for more long-term problem thinking.

To follow up on this introductory statement, respondents were asked whether more relevant short-term problem solving is needed. The answers can be categorised into three groups. The first group agreed with this statement and the importance of more short-term problem solving. Our respondents gave a number of different reasons.

“Yes – it enhances the perception that PA can actually improve the world and find solutions to actual problems. — yes, to increase the visibility of our discipline — Yes public policy is dominated by policy based evidence–making rather than evidence based policy making. It needs more relevant robust applied practice research as opposed to theoretically based high ranking journal centred research — We definitely need more mundane but rigorous empirical research on how things (tools, programs, reforms) work or not.”

By contrast, the second group of answers highlighted the problems of short-term problem thinking and the need for more long-term thinking:

“The major challenges in society will need more long–term thinking — (...) we too much emphasize short term problems and their solutions that in a long time are the very cause or root of the problems. — I think the job of public admin is not to contribute to instant problem solving, but to show
how and why institutions matter for problem solving, how institutions and organizations work, how they shape problem solving and decision making (…).”

One colleague raised an important question about the need for and balance of short-term and long-term problem-solving strategies:

“(…) the crucial question is the relevance of our research for practitioners. What do we want? Do we want to be their consultants or do we want to explain their behaviour? Both directions have their advantages and disadvantages. Maybe we should also think about how we can bring them together.”

This fundamental question leads to the third set of answers in relation to short-term and long-term problem solving. Most of our respondents were convinced that the ideal research strategy for PA involves a *mix of both short-term and long-term problem solving*:

“(…) a good mix is necessary — We must be able to provide solutions to the problems faced by civil servants, but mostly help them redefine the frames of these problems to escape short–termism. But solutions would come from strong theory-building activity.”

The combination of the two dichotomous approaches seems to be particularly important in dealing with *crisis*, as two respondents pointed out:

“There may be policy problems which require short–term problem solving such as a crisis and there is a place for short term problem solving as not every event is predictable. However, events which lead to a crisis are usually complex and avoidable. A crisis usually demonstrates the lack of long term problem solving. Long-term planning and attempting to address wicked policy problems should be a priority, but may not be politically salient as politicians want immediate solutions within election calendars — Crisis management requests short-term problem solving and long-term solutions.”

In the next stage of the survey process, we were interested in *research instruments*, which could be used to develop realistic visions for the future beyond short-term problem solving. Not surprisingly, the research instruments most often mentioned overlap to some extent with the major challenges facing
PA until 2035, notably comparative research and interdisciplinary projects and collaborations:

“To create multi-group research projects that can activate comparative researches. — Cross-country and multidisciplinary research strategies to address long-term, wicked policy problems. — Discussing beyond disciplinary boundaries. — Interdisciplinary in topics, methods, profile of researches etc. & international (cross-cultural) collaboration.”

In this vein, respondents also mentioned the necessity to combine practical and theoretical knowledge in interdisciplinary projects:

“To mix theoretical and practical aspects into interdisciplinary projects cross-disciplines collaborations with academia and practitioners.— Combination of fundamental (and generic) research and cooperation/inspiration between researchers and practitioners.”

Besides comparative research and interdisciplinary collaborations, big data and in particular the use of big data in mixed methods research designs were frequently mentioned as a tool for creating realistic visions for the future:

“to learn how to use big data analytics — Collect big and complex data sets. — Ambitious mixed methods research (…). Mixed methods implies the use of rigorous observational data, including ‘big data’, experimental studies and advances qualitative methods, including ethnographic work — As much data as possible – discovery of patterns in data – predicting the future along non-stop monitoring for changes and adaptation — More mixed methodology combining quantitative series of data analysis and qualitative in depth understanding/interpretation.”

Apart from these two instruments, respondents again criticised the current publishing strategies used within the field of PA and suggested the following innovative approaches:

“First, a place to publish in an open form. Journals are outdated for this mission: academically indexed Youtube videos of researchers commenting, blog’s, etc? — (…) rapid publication of shorter research pieces in PA journals”.
Others underlined the importance of philosophy for creating realistic visions for the future and overcoming short-term problem solving:

“foundational philosophical debate may stimulate long(er)–term thinking, and hence also research designs orientated to more fundamental issues (a drawback is reduced accessibility of research outputs so derived to ‘standard’ outlets of publication). — political philosophy — Theoretical and philosophical research could show the way for the overpowering role of administration in all social life (in all organisations and management/leadership).”

With regard to teaching strategies for the futures of PA, comparative studies and interdisciplinary approaches were again most often cited. One of our respondents put forward the idea of a coherent and interdisciplinary concept of teaching:

“PA teaching should align itself with other disciplines, such as management, anthropology, sociology. Develop business and society modules to enhance the importance of PA in societal change processes. Work across disciplinary boundaries. Work with practitioners and policy makers to develop joint curriculum. Add value to society so have courses of greater relevance to societal problems. Predict future skills needs for public servants and align curricula according to these skills gaps. Work with HR Directors in PA agencies to determine what they need for the future.”

Other issues raised included the integration of future topics and future scenarios in teaching strategies:

“Integrate ‘future topics’ (like the city of the future for instance) in current curriculums/seminars. Train students to look more ahead than backwards — add scenarios and make more interactive research with the students. — More courses in (...) future studies – “Scenarios (look at a crystal ball).”

Furthermore, respondents stated that case-based teaching should still play a role in teaching futures:

“This could involve using case study type of teaching which engages students in design thinking; working on potential cases could be a strategy to facilitate this — Case–studies approaches. Best practices.”
Conversely, case-based teaching and the use of best practices were also criticised:

“Case-based teaching and best practices are counterproductive to this, I think. Combining theoretical concepts and project work are preferred strategies.”

Finally, a fairly controversial statement made by one of the respondents implies that teaching strategies are systematically and naturally biased by the interests of an “old generation” of teachers and therefore do not meet the needs of future scholars in the field of PA.

“The future matters for today’s students more than it does to their teachers who have shorter futures! Those teachers have a selfish stake in the present state of knowledge which may inhibit their capacity to encourage more future-orientated work.”

To conclude, the participants in our survey clearly stated that there is a need to improve both short-term and long-term problem and solution thinking. The main strategy identified to improve our discipline’s fitness for the future was the rigorous application of an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and comparative perspective in research and teaching. Often cited, but not quite so often, were comments about integrating the issues of using big data into our research.

2.4 Cultures

The third section of our Internet-based qualitative survey was concerned with the interplay of different European traditions and cultures. We collected our colleagues’ opinion on this pressing matter and specifically asked for their suggestions about how we, as the European PA community, should respond. Again, we started with a provocative statement:

*Public Administration in Europe does not sufficiently take into account the many different cultures and traditions in Europe.*

About two-thirds of our respondents agreed with this statement, but the remaining third gave interesting reasons for their disagreement. One comment raised the important issue that there is not a lack of recognition of cultural differences, but a lack of forward-looking *EU-wide solution thinking* instead:
“I think different cultures are recognized. Moreover, there are EU-wide problems, which require EU-wide solutions (e.g. climate change). This needs EU-wide research whilst taking into account cultures and traditions.”

According to some respondents, this situation results from shortcomings in our theories and methods.

“I think this is a result of the weaknesses of our theories and the failure to integrate context into the theories. — We talk about different cultures all the time. We lack a sufficient way to analyse differences, trends, convergence (…)”.

When we asked how the European community of PA scholars could take the notion of different cultures seriously, avoid “one-size-fits-all” approaches and ensure mutual learning, most responded that comparative research is the strategy to embed and acknowledge cultural diversity in our studies: “comparisons are the key to appreciating diversity.” Respondents asked to “take comparative PA research to a new level (away from country case studies to more advanced statistical methods)” and emphasised the need for the PA community to “be culturally sensitive and truly comparative.”

This demand seems to be related to the challenge of “stopping the Anglo-Saxon domination and giving more attention to other parts of Europe”:

“Some parts of Europe are totally beyond the scope of the mainstream European PA scholarships, e.g. especially some larger countries in Southern and Eastern Europe. The ‘European perspective’ is very much influenced by the studies of a few core EU countries, which have great PA scholars.”

Another approach, often mentioned alongside the need for “real comparative work,” is the requirement to extend “cross-national projects, programs and initiatives (…)” and to foster “contacts between researchers from different countries (…) in order to recognize different cultures and solutions” as well as “all forms of ‘mobility’, including long-term mobility of scholars in countries other than the home country (…)”.

Again interdisciplinary work was raised as an issue, especially the need for “being open to introduce historians, anthropologists to the research teams.” Respondents stressed the necessity to change the current PA curricula and pay “more attention to developments in Europe” and “international perspectives” as well as to “introduce intercultural awareness in our curricula.”
In the second stage, we asked more concretely for suggestions of how to embed cultural diversity in our research and teaching. Not surprisingly, our respondents again emphasised that this could not be achieved unless we carry out more comparative research. As regards “research,” comparative projects/research/work were often cited together with approaches to embed cultural diversity in PA teaching. In order to embed cultural diversity in our research, some of our respondents favoured using methodological approaches such as “cross-country experiments” and “in-depth interviews” as appropriate strategies. Additionally, others suggested the development of “specific cultural sensitive instruments/methodologies” as well as the awareness of the necessity “(…) to replicate findings made in one country in other countries and based on that, research on causes for differences in the replication.”

Participation in exchange programmes was very often mentioned as a way of strengthening the nexus between cultural diversity and PA teaching. On the one hand, this implies “Erasmus-like programmes for teachers” as well as “more guest lectures,” including “invitations to lecturers/speakers from different cultures.” On the other hand, students should be encouraged by means of “Europe-wide excursions (…) to widen their scope.” Furthermore, PA institutes should campaign to “recruit more diverse students.”

To sum up, most comments in this part of the survey underlined the necessity to intensify comparative research, approaches and methods, interdisciplinarity and exchange programmes for scholars and teachers as well as for students as ways to promote cultural diversity in European PA.

2.5 Practices

In the last substantive part of the questionnaire we were interested in the relationship between PA research and teaching and practitioners in public administration as well as in the usefulness of our disciplinary output for European citizens.

Again, we started this section of the survey with a controversial statement:

*Public Administration research and teaching do not deliver sufficient useful knowledge for practitioners and citizens.*

Even though about 57% of our respondents tended to agree with our view, another 43% disagreed and provided some valuable input. Some respondents criticised our “utilitarian view of science”: 
“Because the question is framed in an outdated fashion. Knowledge is not produced in a way that it can be packed and delivered to practitioners. It is produced by interaction. Maybe there is not enough interaction, or public administration is not good enough in facilitating interactions (...).”

Another respondent expressed concerns about the role of PA as a discipline:

“I am not sure that we should do this, we are not consultancy firms (...).”

By contrast, other respondents did not agree with our sceptical view about the usefulness of our research and emphasised that the PA community can deliver useful knowledge to practitioners

“We can always do better, but at least in my country the knowledge transfer has been improved a lot during the last years. — When there is at least some basic receptivity, in my experience PA knowledge is perceived as useful – though PA scholars are less prone to furnish policy advice than other scholarly communities.”

As a follow-up to this introductory statement, we asked our survey participants about suitable strategies to improve the matching of supply and demand between PA research and teaching and practice and citizens. The most frequently mentioned tools for PA research were the improvement of dialogue and development of networks. The majority of respondents perceived these two approaches as being the most promising strategies:

“Improve dialogue – Bring well-educated graduates into practice and to increase the understanding of PA research in practice (...) – How can we develop communities of exchange (...) — Both environments should not be as isolated as they currently often are. The dialogue and each other comprehension is basic, even if sometimes difficult. (...) — Establish communication (conferences, workshops ...) between researchers and practitioners and stress the necessity of knowing each other better. – Closer links with the EU Public Administration.”

What is more, some respondents stressed that practitioners should be actively involved in research projects:

“Include practitioners in different phases of the research (probably in the earlier phases – model construction) so that the theories/models then
tested are already sensitive to specific issues found in practice. — Thinking about some research projects as being co-created by researchers and practitioners.”

Additionally, some respondents again criticised the current publishing strategy in PA research. We, as the European PA community, should ask ourselves: “(...) do we publish in the right papers?” Additional suggestions for more effectively reaching practitioners and citizens were:

“Publish results in practice-oriented journals — We need to value more articles close to practical problems. Theory should be more seen as a way to contribute to real problem solutions — Work more with writing newspaper articles, policy papers and giving speeches in order to disseminate our best research, and picking up relevant topics for on-going and future research. — twitter, write ‘practitioner’ articles, practitioner points in journals, more active attitude of journal editors in promoting research articles, for instance, I very much like the PAR approach.”

Also in the context of teaching, the most frequently mentioned approaches were PA dialogue and network:

“Inviting them to participate and accept our students for internships, doing research on themes relevant to more communities. — Invite practitioners as guest lecturer for special topics that are challenging for practice. — Encourage students for practitioner’s internships.”

In addition, respondents stressed that:

“Practitioners from policy communities and government should be involved or consulted in the design of programmes and research”.

Furthermore, respondents stated that it should be an aim of PA teachers to “convince that public organisations need generalists, not only professionals (e.g. civil engineers, accountants) (...)” and that they should “connect and have dialogue with public managers about initial training for their new members.” Finally, respondents stated that it should also be an aim for PA teachers to:

“(…) give our students the tools that are necessary both to solve practical problems and to understand their conceptual context. Just one side is not enough to find efficient solutions, unfortunately.”
To sum up, it seems that “dialogue” and “networks” are the ultimate strategy to break down the barriers between the PA research and practitioners as well as between scholars of PA and the European citizens.

3 The survey as starting point for the EPPA seminars

This qualitative survey aimed at setting out a “forward view” based on our colleagues’ perceptions of the major challenges and opportunities facing PA, and their suggestions for possible ways forward for the development of PA in Europe over the next 20 years. The survey marked the starting point of the EPPA project’s journey with a “collage” of opinions expressed by a wide variety of both senior-level PA scholars and PA scholars in the early stages of their career.

To conclude, our survey results on the main challenges for PA research and teaching identified by our respondents are made all the more surprising by the range of issues hardly mentioned, if at all, compared to the ones often cited. The overriding concern was the need for more methodological awareness and rigour. Of less significance, but still quite often mentioned, were concerns about interdisciplinarity, theoretical foundations and practical relevance. The attractiveness of the field was seen as the major concern for teaching.

As for the disciplines, there was awareness that multidisciplinarity is both an asset and a necessity, but it has to be organised and developed. A balance between sufficient specialisation and co-ordination of disciplines will be necessary to tackle complex problems and issues. Political Science and Management Sciences substantially shape the PA agenda, as they are the most prominent stakeholders. Clearly, big data, comparisons and theories are on the agenda to remain relevant for practice. Even though a number of our respondents have a background in law, issues relating to public law were hardly mentioned. This may be an artefact of the typical Northern-European bias of academic PA and our survey. However, the integration or reintegration of law into current PA discourses remains an open and ongoing concern of the field. As for the future, a pragmatic focus on short-term problems as a driver for research is part of staying relevant. However, the long-term and future-focused strategy is clearly recognised and is most likely to be developed. The participants in our survey clearly express the need to improve research approaches, short-term and long-term problem and solution thinking in coherent research strategies. Regarding cultures, there is a realisation that traditions and language need be taken much more into account in the future PA agenda. This also implies that a European voice should distinguish itself
from the dominant Anglo-Saxon voice, which will ultimately have implications for the comparability of research itself. Finally, when it comes to practice, there is a major concern to stay relevant, even if there is still uncertainty about what strategies are needed to stay relevant. Generally, as the most promising way forward for PA, the establishment of truly interdisciplinary schools and institutes is identified. More specifically, the views of many scholars in our survey add to discussions stipulating that organisation theory should be taken seriously and more should be invested in institutionalisation. Also in PA, institutionalisation is the only way to achieve significance and remain relevant.

Overall, we were pleasantly surprised and reassured by the underlying optimism of our colleagues. The survey results thus delivered the basis of diagnosis and therapeutical treatments that shaped the agenda of our four thematic EPPA seminars on the futures, disciplines, cultures and practices of PA (see the summaries in Chapter 1.4), which continued the conversation already started in our survey. Clearly the field is under pressure and needs to reorganise and reassert itself, but as the following contributions building on these seminars will show, we have both the resources and the ideas to achieve that.

Notes

1. We corrected simple typos in the responses of our participants.

References


