European Perspectives for Public Administration

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Public Administration sciences in Portugal reflect its administrative culture and history. In a country where the national government centralises a wide range of functions, despite some decentralisation initiatives in recent years (Teles, 2016), the long tradition of strong and concentrated administration (Tavares, 2019) has had a significant impact on several aspects of training, research and knowledge development in the field of Public Administration. The enduring influence of this tradition should not be undermined and, therefore, a historical contextualisation and an in-depth knowledge of the state apparatus is needed to understand public administration and administrative practice in Portugal (Tavares & Alves, 2006).

As in other significantly centralised countries in Europe, Portugal has to deal with a sense of distance between citizens and administration. This is reinforced by the systematic institutionalisation of a hegemonic paradigm which is based on the prevalence of administrative law particularly focused on formal issues. This has had an impact both on the way the study of public administration is concentrated on its formal and procedural aspects, as well as on the incidence of law prescriptions in the processes of reform. This concern for structuring the internal organisation of public administration and its relationship with citizens in terms of top-down determination through legal instruments should not be considered without having in view one of the pillars of parliamentary and representative democracy, where models of delegation are preferred over total control of public administration from the political sphere. This desirable separation, in particular if one considers the democratic context of recent decades in Portugal, cannot be dissociated from models of delegation and with the concern to reduce the gap between administration and citizens.

In fact, from the early 1980s, under the influence of a set of reforms inspired by *new public management*, Portugal has witnessed a growing concern with the modernisation and efficiency of public administration, particularly through reforms aimed at reducing its cost and size. This has occurred in parallel with
the search for the promotion of service and process quality, as well as a relevant
growth of the state’s responsibilities over a set of policy areas, as expected in a
post-dictatorship country. In such a complex and – sometimes – contradictory
context, several reforms in recent years have promoted market logic in the
management of public services and fostered the creation of agencies with
greater administrative and financial autonomy, as a way of ensuring a rational,
quasi-entrepreneurial public management approach.

A simple overview of the Portuguese context clearly points to this struggle
between an enduring legalistic and centralised tradition and the need to
promote reforms that challenge the distance between citizens and administra-
tion as well as being able to facilitate the provision of new services with a
concern for efficiency, quality and decentralisation. The democratisation of
the country, together with its fast modernisation and European integration,
needed special attention from the disciplines of administrative sciences and
their study of the Portuguese context.

The best way to understand the essence of Portuguese public administration
is to acknowledge the influence of the French model, with its strong legalistic
tradition, which shaped its organisation and relation with citizens through
administrative law (Tavares & Alves, 2006). Hence, this chapter will describe, in
parallel, both the evolution of Portuguese public administration and the training
and research practices on the topic, with a particular emphasis on the implica-
tions of recent changes and reforms on the future of public administration.

1 Origins and consolidation

“Administration sciences” in Portugal had their origins in the Cameralism
tradition of the eighteenth century (Bilhim, Ramos & Pereira, 2015). Its focus
on the need for strong control over a centralised economy was clearly adequate
to the model of administration of the country’s absolutist monarchy and
highly useful in strengthening the powers of the influential and authoritative
Marquis of Pombal, the eighteenth-century statesman and Secretary of
State for Internal Affairs of the Kingdom, under the rule of King José I. His
reforms aimed at consolidating the crown’s control over the economy on the
continent and in the colonies, where a strong and centralised administration
was a useful tool. In the nineteenth century, the success of the liberal reforms
and belief in the separation of powers led to a central role of administrative
law, which acquired a hegemonic position in the studies devoted to public
administration. At the same time, the old classical school, born in France
in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and then spread throughout
Europe, namely Portugal, was consolidating a paradigm that saw Public Administration sciences as associated with the legal sciences and, in particular, with administrative law. For Bonnin, one of the main French authors of this – then, progressive – perspective, to acquire knowledge of all matters of public administration it would be sufficient to master administrative law. There is clear evidence that Bonnin’s influence did not take long to have an impact in Portugal. In fact, the critical role that Bonnin played in the administrative reforms of Mouzinho da Silveira, promulgated in 1832, very much influenced by and with clear similarities to the French law of 1802, which was the basis of the Napoleonic administrative organisation, is acknowledged.

However, if on the one hand there was an almost immediate impact of the French administrative tradition in Portugal, through the political action of the liberal reforms during the first half of the nineteenth century, its influence on university studies took a little longer. Only in 1853, at the Law School of the University of Coimbra, was a course included as a way to teach the principles of administration and administrative law, following Bonnin’s “Principes d’administration publique.” Later, in 1861, Justino de Freitas published the noteworthy “Instituições de Direito Administrativo Português [Institutions of Portuguese Administrative Law],” and Lobo D’Ávila, in 1874, presented his “Estudos de Administração [Studies of Administration].” Although the last contains issues that could be included in a manual of Public Administration sciences, they were, in fact, administrative law handbooks. In the book “Curso de Ciência da Administração e Direito Administrativo [Course in Administration Science and Administrative Law],” published in the early twentieth century, the author Guimarães Pedrosa seems to promote a first attempt to avoid the strictly normative and legal perspective of the theme, although his sciences of administration still appear as a subsidiary of administrative law. In addition, one of the most influential and notable authors of the twentieth century in Portugal was Marcelo Caetano. Head of government after Salazar, in the authoritarian regime, he was also, and essentially, a devotee of administrative law.

The first sign of transition and evolution from the national status quo resulted from the creation of the Colonial School in 1906, within the Lisbon Society of Geography, where the training of overseas public officials eventually justified the themes of public administration being also considered with a non-juridical approach (Araújo, 2006). However, only at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century did the Salazar regime begin to consider the need to train top public officials using a similar approach to the one in place since 1906 for the colonial administration of the overseas provinces. Nevertheless, for several reasons, but above all given the traditional role and rule of administrative
law, and the long-lasting power of law schools in the context of Portuguese universities (which ultimately reinforced the legalistic tradition in Portuguese public administration that has lasted until today), this did not allow for the creation of an autonomous degree in Public Administration.

One of the most interesting examples of this evolution within the study of Public Administration in Portugal results from the reform of the “Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas Ultramarinas [Higher Institute for Overseas Social and Political Sciences],” under the guidance of Adriano Moreira, who had been Overseas Minister in Salazar’s government. When the institute merged with the Technical University of Lisbon in 1961, faculty members were expected to be trained abroad, and special attention was paid to management sciences. For the first time, a different paradigm was being implemented, which was clearly influenced by an Anglo-Saxon tradition, rather than the dominant continental French perspective. Nevertheless, this was only possible though a three-year bachelor’s degree in Overseas Administration, which was seen as complementary to the areas of social sciences, like anthropology and ethnographic studies.

This rupture, which followed the Columbia University model as in other colonial empires, created a short window of opportunity to develop the sciences of administration outside the national legalistic paradigm. This did not last long, since one of Marcelo Caetano’s first decisions when he took over as head of government after Salazar was to replace Adriano Moreira.

2 The democratic period and the reforms

The institutionalisation of bureaucracy in Portugal allowed for a long period of stability of Salazar’s authoritarian regime. Together with the highly centralised state and its legalistic tradition (Salazar being a law scholar himself), public administration helped the regime to steer and control policies and service delivery. In fact, as suggested by Oliveira Rocha (1991), corporations and other corporate structures, constitutionally relevant to the political regime before democracy, never really existed as powerful agents in the Portuguese political scene, since Salazar failed to institutionalise them, precisely because of the highly centralised administrative system. Interestingly, these same features of Portuguese administrative culture can explain its stability during the transition to democracy and the continuity of a large part of its elite.

The Carnation Revolution in 1974 and the country’s transition to democracy came to question the corporative model of the previous regime, but the political change was clearly insufficient to transform the organisational culture.
Despite this initial continuity in the process of transition between regimes, there were obvious changes in the democratic period that significantly altered the organisation and size of public administration in Portugal. In this period, the growth in the state’s functions came to generate new opportunities and sources of power for the bureaucratic elite, whose importance grew in the face of governmental instability and the fragility of the political system during the first decade of democracy. In fact, with ten governments in ten years, the first decade after the revolution was characterised by significant governmental instability. The central role of political and regime issues and the stability of the social and economic order of the country did not allow for any special attention from policy-makers to public administration. Thus, in addition to its discredit as a consequence of the role played in the stability of the previous regime, Portuguese public administration had relatively low levels of formal educational training. It was only during the process of accession to the European Economic Community that the country began a trajectory that was aimed at ensuring its professionalisation. Besides the needed institutional reforms, these efforts were also seen in the establishment of specialised training for public officials and top-level bureaucrats. The foundation of the National Institute of Administration in 1979 and the creation of the Centre for Municipal Studies and Training (CEFA) in 1980 were important elements to boost administrative reform during this period. It was also in 1979 that the first statute of the public administration officially was approved and published, which reflected a special concern with a new relationship between the political sphere and the parties in government and public administration managers. This statute repealed the lifetime nomination procedure that was in place and was inherited from the previous political regime.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that the number of public administration officials more than doubled between 1968 and 1979. The expansion of the functions of the state, particularly in the sectors of education, health and social security, greatly contributed to this growth. The number of civil servants grew steadily until 2011. In parallel, this increase also reflects the way the public sector included trained human resources that came to be in surplus due to the decolonisation process. Finally, the government’s nationalisation programme of major private economic and industrial agents should not be disregarded, since it played an important role in expanding the functions of the state over the economy, also contributing to increasing public employment.

If the size of Portuguese public administration has undergone considerable growth during the democratic period, it is no less true that its structure has suffered important adjustments. As claimed above, the country was not immune to new public management reforms. This modernisation process in
Portugal was fundamentally grounded on a trend that argued for the relevance of an extensive delegation of competences towards more autonomous public agencies. Although this was not totally new in the Portuguese administrative structure – there were 22 public institutes in 1974 – their number increased considerably, until in 2002 there were 440 public institutes (Tavares, 2019). In addition, in 1989, a constitutional reform put an end to the irreversibility principle of nationalisation, which allowed for a process of privatisation.

These reforms, which were already included in public discourse during the authoritarian regime at the end of the 1960s, with Marcelo Caetano’s government, suggested an idea of state modernisation based on the need to promote economic development and, after the democratic transition, the need to enable public administration to fulfil welfare state roles. A Secretariat for Administrative Reform was created in November 1969 to suggest new organisational structures, new statutes for public administration employees and new ways of delivering public services. However, none of these reforms were implemented before 1974.

It was only in 1986, the year in which Portugal became a full member of the – then – European Economic Community, that the topic of State and public administration reform was placed high on the political agenda, with the establishment of the Secretary of State for Administrative Modernisation. As regards its policy agenda and strategy, one should take into consideration the role of the Office for Studies and Coordination of the Administrative Reform, operational since 1982, under the Minister for Justice and Administrative Reform. Its focus was on delivering advice on several relevant aspects, such as administrative simplification, the training of top-level officials and public servants’ careers. The mission of this new Secretary of State was highly demanding and aimed at changing public administration’s organisational aspects, processes and practices, which were rooted in decades of administrative culture. However, the course of the reform over the following years can be characterised more as a set of small scale and sectoral changes, with specific policy measures, rather than a mobilising strategic orientation.

The enactment of the Administrative Procedure Code in 1992 represents an important instrument that consolidated the governmental initiatives of the period, since it provided new accountability mechanisms and new citizens’ rights as regards public administration, introducing transparency in reaction to a culture of unpredictability. Nevertheless, it is still evidence of a legalist tradition, motivated by a significant degree of wishful thinking associated with top-down enforcement of legislation. It was also during this period that, together with privatisation, the first experiences of contracting out began, though in some cases with unsatisfactory results, especially in services
provided by a monopolistic market, as was the paradigmatic case of meals in hospital canteens, with poorer quality for the same price (Tavares, 2019).

As with the new public management-inspired reforms, Portugal was also influenced by the quality movement in public administration. One could see in this behaviour a culture of adherence to international trends, especially in the case of reforms originating in Europe’s most advanced administrations. Several initiatives emphasising quality as a central feature of public administration modernisation were implemented, and they included a National Quality Council (1992) a Charter for Quality of Public Services (1993), a quality competition in public services and advanced training in quality management for senior public managers. Quality management standards, which in essence go far beyond the bureaucratisation of services, were not valued by reason of their content and desirable impact, but suffered from the same hindrances that new public management measures had to face: the fulfilment of top-down defined procedures, which had to obey a set of rules and norms that were predefined, in accordance with the resilient legalist tradition.

This commitment of the Portuguese government to the implementation of quality management tools is even clearer with the approval in 2000, in Porto, of the Common Assessment Framework, aimed at promoting self-assessment of public services, by the Quality Steering Group of which Portugal was a member. It included the European Foundation for Quality Management, the European Commission, the European Institute of Public Administration, the Speyer Academy, together with Austria, Finland and Germany. Even though it quickly became more of an ephemeral and short-term tool, like other trends of reform in Portuguese public administration, amongst other services, the Social Security Institute for Financial Management was one of the enthusiasts for using the CAF model (Tavares, 2019).

This “trend adherence” culture is also evident in the way some international reports and reference works were cited and widely used as an explicit inspiration to many subsequent governments seeking modernisation and administration restructuring. Amongst other examples, this was true of Reinventing Government (1992) by David Osborne and Ted Gabler, and of the Gore Report (1994).

This first step in Portuguese public administration reform was the result of a relatively stable period of governance, between 1986 and 2001, with different governments’ political agendas on the theme being supported by a large and enduring majority in parliament, from both the Social Democrats and the Socialists. These reform agendas (e.g. citizen-centred services, mission driven, focus on outcomes, delegation of competencies, and partnerships with the private and third sectors) were often influenced by the principles of new public
management, and by the major international public administration trends, presented as rational and efficiency-driven reforms rather than ideologically influenced ones. However, these measures faced two main problems. On the one hand, there was no clear distinction between the different policy initiatives, which often resulted in ephemeral and contradictory effects. For example, service outsourcing and privatisation allowed for some cost reduction, but were unable to maintain the expected quality standards. Naturally this came in clear contradiction of the quality management discourse in terms of relevant reform measures. On the other hand, while the efficiency rhetoric was presented in direct association with administrative simplification, problems related to market monopolies, corporative interests and a growth of more than 100,000 employees in the public sector, resulted in clear contradictions (Tavares, 2019).

The following years were characterised, again, by a collection of stand-alone policy measures and partial reforms rather than a strategic implementation of a modernisation agenda. The most emblematic and controversial measure was the adoption of a new integrated system of performance assessment for public administration (SIADAP), influenced by the principles of management by objectives. This had the merit of substantially altering – or at least trying to – the focus of a process-centred and legalistic framework to a results-oriented public administration. To this reform one should add a programme of administrative and legal simplification (SIMPLEX), which recently had its second generation of policy measures (SIMPLEX+), and the government’s reform aimed at restructuring public administration’s central services (PRACE). In essence, these followed an integrated and reformist logic, taking advantage of the existing knowledge and international best practices, particularly in Western Europe, and were followed up by a newly established Agency for Administrative Modernisation, in close collaboration with a Secretary of State for Administrative Modernisation. Evidently, the recent financial crisis and the subsequent Troika involvement through the assistance programme placed significant pressure on national authorities to accelerate public sector reforms. The bail-out process explains to some extent the recent pace of reforms (Teles, 2014).

The more recent initiatives, though still emerging and quite embryonic, are related to a closer collaboration with civil society’s initiatives and partnerships with the third sector, in an attempt to follow policy co-creation and co-delivery strategies.

Despite the fact that the implementation of change, and above all the institutionalisation of new practices in the public sector, particularly in a context where it results from a long tradition of centralisation and of legalist
culture, tends to be rather slow, these 45 years of democracy have witnessed significant advances in administrative simplification, modernisation, citizen proximity, the public service’s efficiency improvements and accountability. Unfortunately, despite the fact that most of the policy measures, service professionalisation and simplification strategies have been implemented, their impacts have never been comprehensively evaluated, which reveals a culture that tends to avoid scrutiny and continues to keep the political and administrative spheres within close ties.

3 Teaching and research: the recent years

Democratic transition, with its subsequent academic freedom and the growth in number and quality of public universities in Portugal, has allowed for the fast adaptation and internationalisation of teaching and research in the administrative sciences. This would have allowed for a rapid adjustment of this scientific field to European standards if it had not been for both the long tradition of being considered as a subfield of Administrative Law, to which we have extensively referred, and the insipient and underfunded higher education system during the first years of democracy. Nevertheless, in 1980 the science of administration began its emancipation of administrative law as the bachelor’s degree in management and Public Administration was established, in the context of the reform of the ISCSP (the Higher Institute for Social and Political Sciences, which had already lost its “Overseas” label). Also in the 1980s the young University of Minho launched a degree in regional and local Public Administration, which was later restructured in the following decade, adopting the designation of just Public Administration, as ISCSP did in 2008, in the framework of the Bologna reform (Rocha, 2006).

The School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho with its Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD degrees in the field of Public Administration was clearly focused on internationalisation, encouraging its faculty members to obtain doctoral degrees abroad, and promoting international research networks, in particular with the US.

Different paths, but all giving higher visibility and autonomy to this disciplinary approach, were followed in subsequent years by other Portuguese universities. That was the case of the – already referred to – ISCSP. Even though it was not able to adapt with the flexibility that all these reforms required, since it was actually the oldest and most pioneering school in the field, it was later able to introduce a master’s degree in management and public administration and a doctorate programme in social sciences, with
a specialisation in the field (later a PhD in Public Administration). The last 20 years have been, in fact, the most relevant in this field, regarding the way several universities answered to the need to offer degrees, train public administrators and create research centres on the topic: at the University of Aveiro, with a clear focus on an interdisciplinary approach to Public Administration, with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Public Administration and a PhD in Public Policies; at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, initially within the department of Sociology, and now with a special focus on training top-level public managers; and at the Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra, there is clear evidence of change in the academic landscape. There are also, in the higher education sector, some polytechnic institutes with degree courses in specific fields within administration, such as Municipal Public Management.

At the same time, in the field of training staff and managers – a perspective of vocational training and development – the National Institute of Administration (INA) has played an important role since the 1980s (Tavares & Alves, 2006).

Each of these institutions has particular and distinguishable features: teaching and research at the School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho are obviously conditioned by the main scientific fields in the title of the school where it is incorporated; and in the case of the University of Aveiro, within the Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences, governance, public policies and particularly regional and local governments obtain special attention, with clear impact on the research agenda being developed at the Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies Research Centre. Though relying on a small group of faculty members and researchers, both were able to establish significant and extensive international networks. These specialisations can be translated into specific scientific fields that reflect institutional histories or departmental focuses: ISCSP, political science; ISCTE, sociology; University of Coimbra, law. Nevertheless, through following different routes, the research and teaching of Public Administration in Portugal has evolved significantly in recent years.

4 Looking ahead

Despite all the significant advances in administrative simplification, and even with the more recent implementation of the digital government agenda, administrative modernisation has rarely been seen as having a clear path with a strategic plan, although there have been moments of greater coherence. The best moments were reflected in the adoption and implementation of
dozens of fragmented measures, geared towards micro aspects of public management, with considerable impact on the quality of services provided to citizens (Tavares, 2019). This has occurred in the majority of government scenarios but, even in these cases, administrative reform was always seen as falling short of expectations. The trend to emphasise simplification and service amalgamation may have hidden several real problems with the administrative culture, human resources and processes. However, it is fair to emphasise the role in this process of the Agency for Administrative Modernisation, since it has been the main coordinating body for modernisation over the last ten years. There has been a clear commitment from political logic and technical rationality to provide greater legitimacy to the reform processes but, as in all such commitments, compromises and concessions often do not allow for the full implementation of policy choices.

Public administration is becoming more complex and demanding. As an immediate consequence, Public Administration sciences in Portugal are asked to play a relevant role and require fast adaptation. As claimed by Tavares & Alves (2006), the daily life of the Portuguese public administration is still very much subject to administrative law, but it is possible to trace the history of the contribution of different sub-fields since the 1960s: economic planning, technological development, social and political sciences, systems management and management sciences.

Another relevant feature to take into account is the fact that most of the academic programmes in Public Administration were precisely – and explicitly – aimed at improving the quality of human resources. This focus on training, both at the graduate level and with long-life learning courses, is understandable given the rate of reforms, the growth of employment in the public sector and the inherited administrative tradition. However, in most cases this has been pursued to the detriment of research.

This context requires a shift to a more pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach within the study of Public Administration. Critical aspects such as policy assessment, strategic management, decentralisation mechanisms, governance, information management and budgeting, public procurement, digitalisation and citizen engagement are placed high on the agenda of the next year’s challenges for Portuguese public administration. These do not result from a divergent approach when compared to other international trends, which means that the available knowledge and research on the topic will certainly contribute to the modernisation of public administration in the country. In addition, there is a need to intensify the internationalisation of research and teaching. This path has already been followed by some of the universities’ training programmes and research centres (as is the case of the Research Unit
on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies, and the Department of 
Social, Political and Territorial Sciences at the University of Aveiro; and of the 
Research Centre in Political Science, with its two research groups on Public 
Policy and Management and on Governance and Democracy, at the University 
of Minho), but, nonetheless, it still requires further development. Evidently, a 
balance is needed between this path of internationalisation and the deep and 
detailed knowledge of the contextual and cultural aspects of national public 
administration, at the central, regional and local levels. Evidently, given the 
fact that this academic field has a longer history of research and knowledge 
dissemination in other countries, there could be a temptation to emulate 
and produce a “foreign view” over national embedded problems. The risk of 
reductionism, redundancy and divorce in relation to the daily life of public 
administration in Portugal should be avoided.

As explained above, the teaching of Public Administration in Portugal has 
clearly followed two paths, inspired by different paradigms: the Anglo-Saxon 
Administrative Sciences which find shelter in Public Administration Science 
as an autonomous scientific area, and the Continental Europe approach, which 
considers it as an evolution of Administrative Law. In parallel to professional 
training, the teaching of Public Administration in universities has been 
gradually incorporating as core areas courses in Administrative Sciences and 
Public Management in parallel to Political Science, Management, Law and 
Economics, particularly after the Bologna process. Evidently, the weight of 
these areas varies according to each university’s profile and the influence of 
its faculty’s training background.

The adjustment of the study plans of the different degrees in Public Ad 
ministration after the Bologna declaration and subsequent process, together 
with the integration of Portuguese academics in European research networks 
in this field and the inescapable influence of the Europeanisation of public 
policies and of public administration trends as new public management, 
helps to explain the growing relevance of courses in public management 
and administrative sciences in training. This recent, and gradual, change in 
the profile of training and research in Public Administration is leading the 
country to a detachment from its historical path which was dominated by 
Administrative Law.

More than a competition between European and US influence on training 
and reforms in Portugal, the main cleavage is still between traditional and 
contemporary perspectives. A recent example of this is the contracts with 
researchers suggested by the parliamentary ad hoc commission (in 2019) 
created to present paths of reforms regarding the decentralisation process 
in Portugal, which were, almost exclusively, established by Administrative
Law professors. This is also evidence that reinforces a political culture that attributes reliability and authority to law, rather than to administrative sciences. Evidence can also be found in the relative low level of importance given to academia and research in this field during the reform processes, with important impacts on public administration in Portugal, as a consequence of the crisis and the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Troika (EU, IMF, ECB) in 2011.

It is admissible to consider that there are two significant conflicts within Public Administration research and teaching in Portugal. The first is the consequence of a clear generation cleavage between a formalist and legalist group of scholars, publishing mostly in Portuguese and with an important influence on decision making, and a younger group, trained abroad, with relevant international networks and publishing in English-language journals. The second results from the clear division between the traditional approach to Public Administration as a specific branch of law (i.e. administrative law) and the multidisciplinary approach with a focus on administrative sciences as an autonomous field of knowledge. These two cleavages coincide in separate groups, which means that the most influential at the national level is still embedded in a traditional and legalist perspective, while the more internationalised one is developing research within the agenda of associated scholars in Europe. This has often resulted in a tension between policy formulation and research. However, the training of civil servants and the changing culture of Public Administration research in Portuguese universities are leading to a growing relevance of the most internationalised units and research groups, which will certainly lead to a more relevant role of academia in designing and supporting reforms and to a greater impact on agenda setting, and in its implementation and assessment.

References


