LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS
Lessons and Next Steps

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We are at the end of our book and our surveys of the state and the future of PA in Europe in the next 20 years, but we are not at the end of our journey. Quite the opposite; we are at the beginning. It is obvious that the academic field of Public Administration needs to evolve with the realities and practices of public administration, and that it should try better to understand, explain and ultimately influence those realities – hopefully for the better. It is less obvious to say how that should happen in concrete terms: how we should prepare and develop our research and the teaching of our academic field of Public Administration for the future of the public sector. In ideal terms our research and teaching are academic evidence to its theories and methods; it is considered relevant by practice; and it is ahead of problems and anticipating possible solutions and trajectories. A contemporary Public Administration is critical to its contemporaneous practices. This requires an organised reflection of what and how we conduct our research and organise our teaching.

1 European Perspectives (plural) for Public Administration

The strategy of EPPA I has been to look for common challenges and possible answers across the European public administration space. We hope we made clear in the introduction that our project is not about coherence, but about diversity. It is not about predicting the next big theme or “fad” of PA, but about starting a process of reflection about our field.

We have used the Minnowbrook perspective as an inspiration, not as a blueprint, and even when we refer to the Minnowbrook conclusions (2018) and to the recent NAPA’s Grand Challenges, this book is still about Europe. We are interested in how PA communities in Europe could and should prepare themselves and anticipate research and teaching to be open to new questions and challenges, to be able to cope and understand them, and eventually
influence how we can better deal with futures, and yet unknown developments and challenges. From this point of ambition, we looked at the meta level of PA challenges and strategies for research and teaching. This resulted in our four coherent dimensions for driving research and teaching: a focus on futures, on disciplines, on cultures, and on practice. We are not claiming that these four dimensions are the only ones relevant for PA in Europe for the next 20 years, but our survey and especially our seminars have confirmed that “futures,” “disciplines,” “culture” and “practice” are important and necessary starting points and concerns for the next 20 years.

It should also be clear from the beginning that the purpose of the project and the book is not comparative. We did not start out to compare countries or approaches, but we aimed at bringing out commonalities and differences. Our focus is not to look at what the public sector will look like in 20 years, even if we refer to significant and dramatic changes and shifts in the public sphere (climate, demography, ICT, politics...). Given our awareness of these changes, our focus is on the fact that PA should not continue on the path of the last 20 years, but needs to discuss and find a strategy for the next 20. If there is a comparative result at all, it is that these four strategies (futures, disciplines, cultures, practice) should be a part of that strategy, and will allow us to challenge the unknown and be ahead of possible future realities.

Based on the four seminars the contributions in this volume sharpen these concerns and sketch current, but especially desirable, essential and necessary developments and orientations. Again, the main aim is not comparison and coherence, but to highlight and learn from diversity.

Concerning “futures” Paul Joyce argues convincingly that much more attention needs to be paid to the future by academics in both their research and their teaching, and that appropriate techniques and skills useful for the delivery of long-term strategic visions and goals should, amongst others, include trend analysis, scenario planning and policy experimentation. Geert Bouckaert and Meelis Kitsing discuss in more detail the probably most controversial but also most useful of these approaches, i.e. the use of utopias (and dystopias) and of scenarios as thought experiments. Instead of emphasising one prediction or forecast on the basis of previous developments and current trends, they argue, it would be wise to think teleologically about it in terms of alternative scenarios.

As regards “disciplines” Thurid Hustedt, Tiina Randma-Liiv and Riin Savi give an overview of the many disciplines concerned with public administrations and their quite often problematic relationships, which furthermore differ greatly between European regions. But PA is much more than “the chameleon moving through the ivory tower.” Quoting Christopher Pollitt
they stress that what unifies public administration is its subject – the state, the public sector and the public realm – not its aims, theories or methods. We are a field, not a discipline. They confirm that PA needs all these different disciplines, but that overall the field is shaped by structures of academic organisation, conferences, journals and academic communities that tend to create silos of specialisation and hinder research across fields. So the proper institutionalisation of PA teaching and research should be one of our main concerns. Martin Burgi and Philippe Bezes take up these concerns and discuss the problematic relations between PA and two of its most important, but for some time sidelined disciplines, public law and sociology. They strongly argue that the potential for cooperation between Public Administration, administrative law and sociology is far from exhausted, and that these two disciplines offer important and indispensable empirical and theoretical foundations of PA, which we can ignore only to the great detriment of our field.

Concerning “cultures” Salvador Parado shows, using Spain as an example, how democratisation, the territorialisation of power, the expansion of the welfare state and the diversity of society and religion through substantial population inflows change the cultural and institutional basis of public administrations. Unfortunately, PA scholars have not dealt sufficiently with the challenges that these pressures are exerting at all governmental and administrative levels, and on organisations. Based on a comprehensive study in the Netherlands, Mark Bovens and his co-authors illustrate the transformation of society from the increasing ethnic heterogeneity, which they call “super-diversity,” and discuss the consequences for public governance and administration. The importance of religion and language is taken up by Bogdana Neamtu, again from her specific perspective of her country and university in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, which has a long tradition of the co-existence of different languages and religions. Cultural diversity obviously has a long history in Europe, and she stresses that PA research needs to take stock of this diverse historic and demographic variety. Perspectives from other disciplines are necessary if we are to develop a sound body of European PA research on cultural diversity, but PA first of all needs to develop its own research agenda on these topics.

Finally, as regards the relationship with “practice” we have re-printed a seminal paper from the late Christopher Pollitt. He argues for a more structured, collective debate within PA academia about practitioner-oriented research, the creation of stronger representational associations at both national and international levels, a further movement away from the model of the lone researcher – or even the lone department – towards big teams operating across a range of institutions, and a rapid expansion of interdisciplinary
research, not just by co-operation with other social sciences. It ought to become normal to find PA specialists working with colleagues from the natural sciences on teams which address problems such as climate and demographic or technological change. Edoardo Ongaro makes the important distinction between enlightening, problem-orientated and practice-extrapolation knowledge and argues that all three are significant and necessary for the development of the practical relevance of PA. He argues, like Pollitt, that our associations, like EGPA, have an important role to play in developing the use of these different forms of knowledge. Raffaella Saporito starts from the breaks in the learning loop between theory and practice, the well-known theory-practice gap, and argues that the problem is not just the scarce interest of practitioners in evidence-based policy or their superficial attraction for best practice and protocols, but the practice of scholars themselves. There is an obvious heterogeneity of potential beneficiaries of PA research, and furthermore the epistemic gap between positive and normative theories, which have to be addressed from our side.

But we did not look only for diversity and common denominators across the European public administration space; we also emphasised (and we had already learned in the cross-cutting chapters) that Europe is extremely diverse in its legal, historical and cultural contexts. There is not just one European Perspective for Public Administration; there is a plurality of perspectives, which could even be called, in some cases, perspectives in Europe, which we share with other parts of the world. It is interesting to read that nearly all of the recent Minnowbrook conclusions (see chapter one) also apply to the European context. That makes a dialogue useful and possible. But we have to go beyond Minnowbrook and define our own agenda.

The PA diversity and plurality in Europe are grounded in the diversity of Europe. This book, therefore, also looks into the diversity and path-dependent perspectives in a range of countries, as a complement to the common perspectives. The legal frameworks, the languages, the cultures and all the other elements discussed in the first part of this book heavily influence these diverse perspectives, and it is indeed amazing how different we are.

In the case of Norway, a non-EU country that has one of the highest EU-compliance scores, empirical research is influencing policies, as part of a high-trust society. It being a small country with an open approach, internationalisation of its research is important. Research has been heavily influenced by organisation theory and focuses increasingly on political and democratic contexts, and on transboundary wicked issues.

Dutch Public Administration research is also international, but is also aware that local relevance should be taken into account. After a divergence
from political science, there is an awareness that a more converging strategy will be useful to integrate changing political processes in a democratic system.

In Germany, the disciplinary silos are not matching well with the multi-disciplinary needs. Here the “bifurcation” of German PA between internationalised and theory-driven, and the more practical and country-oriented factions need to find common ground.

In France, PA is not a proper and autonomous field of its own, but is part of a wider spectrum of French social sciences, with their own methodological traditions of sociological qualitative and grassroots-driven micro studies. Sociology remains an important academic discipline for PA, even if law has dominated the practice.

In Portugal, PA has had to adjust its research to changing political contexts, to European requirements and to crisis-driven reforms. Even if law is very dominant in the public sphere, PA is considered to be relevant, especially in the field of human resources. As such, Portuguese PA has been influenced by an Anglo-Saxon and a continental European PA tradition. The PA future in Portugal will be influenced by a generational change which will reduce the influence of the formalist and legalist group of scholars. That may push PA out of law departments to allow for more disciplinary inputs.

Italian PA has suffered from significant national budget cuts, which triggered a reduction in research capacity and an increase in the migration of Italian scholars to foreign universities. Paradoxically, this has resulted in more comparative research including Italian cases and a broadening of topics being researched. This is a sign of the resilience of Italian PA.

In the Estonian case, the awareness that a small country needs a smart, innovative and merit-based public sector even more has strongly influenced PA research. Combined with a clear digital agenda, which was also picked up by research, Estonian PA is at the front line and very international.

Finally, the Hungarian PA community, which developed only after the demise of communism, is coping with the “illiberal” democratic system changes within a European context. This could lead to a diverging trend because of institutional redesigns.

So, even in our limited and unrepresentative survey of the state of PA in different European countries there is much more diversity than expected. Our firm belief is that we should take this not as a weakness, but as a strength of PA in and for Europe. PA will become stronger if it acknowledges and uses the multitude of disciplines, cultures, futures and practices in European PA. For this broad agenda we need associations like EGPA and projects like EPPA. But we also have to think about alternatives for how we conduct and organise our research and teaching in the next 20 years.
Seven possible approaches to redefining research and teaching futures for PA

But how do we prepare for this future? We have observed that research and teaching in the field of PA have been too reactive and not sufficiently proactive, anticipating or even guiding possible futures and realities. If or when this is the case, the question arises how we define strategies that are ahead of possible realities, so that we can influence them by supporting desirable and refraining from undesirable possible futures.

Looking at the collective experience amassed in this book, we could define seven approaches for determining possible trends in Public Administration. Obviously, there is, on the one hand, an assumption that trends are there and should be discovered. There is, on the other hand, another assumption that states that trends are to be invented and created in a self-fulfilling or self-denying way. All these trends need to be confirmed by realities to come.

A Contingency Approach: a first way to define futures is to rely on a classical contingency approach. Based on facts, it is possible to extrapolate and to assume that a certain trend which is announced and detected will proceed and continue. In this sense, PA is still reacting to external trends which it is following, sometimes in an early, sometimes in a later stage, since research calls certainly do not always anticipate our possible futures.

It is clear that in the European case, the contingencies of the changing European context have influenced our research and teaching strategies in PA. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 resulted in a whole portfolio of “transition governance” for Central and Eastern European countries. The expansion of the EU, adding ten countries in 2004 plus two in 2007, plus one in 2013, probably minus one in 2020, has redefined and added “convergence governance” as a new topic in research and teaching. The Balkan wars have certainly added “post-conflict governance,” and even a “failed state” agenda, to our research and teaching. The EU’s deepening strategy with Schengen in 1985, the Single Market in 1993 and the security portfolio has emphasised the topics of “governance of co-ordination” for policies and agencies. The Global Economic Crises (GEC) in 2008 has further enhanced and expanded an existing agenda. From establishing the “Euro” (1999-2002), through the Lisbon Treaty (2009), to the Greek crisis (2011-2012), a whole “macro governance” agenda studying institutional stability was added. Obviously, the European agenda has also embraced the SDGs, especially with the Paris Agreement in 2015 on climate change. This has resulted in a “wicked problems governance” agenda, including migration, climate and all 17 SDGs. Finally, the European agenda to protect
privacy by means of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has triggered and pushed the agenda of “cloud and big data governance” with all its related issues, such as, for example, block-chain, and algorithms.

This contingency approach has been partly supported by the ERC research calls, the H2020 and the next generation of national and European research programmes. It is clear that this approach of looking for contingencies could be more detailed. We could assume, with the shifts in our political systems, that even more fundamental and systemic contingencies may become very pressing and urgent, such as governance with or without democracy, or governance with or without government, or governance of fragile/failed states with/without a rule of law. It is also obvious that increasingly “non-western governance” is emerging as an alternative and effective model, for example Chinese governance models. It will be essential for Europe to develop its own governance perspectives, but also to start a dialogue with Asian, Latin-American, African and MENA Perspectives for Public Administration. Obviously, we should begin and continue to have a dialogue between EPPA and US-based Minnowbrook discussions.

A Normative Approach: we have argued in this book that our current PA teaching and research are running too far behind the facts, that they are too much dominated by a single discipline (which could be law, or economics, or management, or politics, …), that we have too much causality and not enough teleological thinking, that we aim too much for general mechanisms and not enough for cultural features, and, finally, that we have too little relevance for practice, even if we are academically sound. If these assumptions are correct, we will have to change.

Therefore, a normative approach to future trends tells us that PA should do the opposite of what is happening, and be ahead of facts, combine existing and new disciplines, be more teleological, include more culture, and have more relevance. Launching this EPPA I has as an ambition to push European researchers to include more futures, more disciplines, more culture (defined as ethnicity, languages and religion), and be more relevant.

A Strategic Approach: when research means addressing known questions and generating scientifically known answers, we define our history of PA. When research means addressing known questions which generate unknown answers, we talk about most of our current research programmes. However, a strategic approach is about starting to raise unknown questions which trigger an intuition regarding what to develop as answers, such as, for example, big, open and cloudy data. Finally, there is the double strategy of unknown questions and answers, which really pushes us out of our comfort zone as
researchers, but also out of our predictable career and publication trajectories. The unknown questions with unknown answers push us to the real wicked PA issues or to non-Western PA topics. It will be our responsibility to develop strategies to cover these topics in an academic way, since they may have the highest relevance for our futures.

A Disciplinary Approach: historically, there has been an ever continuing debate on the various disciplines constituting the academic field of PA. The emphasis or most dominant discipline is often defined by historical and cultural features of a country and its tradition. However, we observe that the changing way the public sphere is interacting with society, and the technological shifts propelling our way of life and our production functions impact immensely on the need for PA. It certainly implies that a mono-disciplinary approach, with its vertical deepening, is necessary but certainly not sufficient. It needs to be combined with the widening of a horizontal disciplinary approach. It requires a rebalancing of the existing disciplines (law, politics, economics, management, sociology). It also requires new disciplines such as social psychology, anthropology, robotics/engineering or geomatics. Behavioural PA is presented as a new type of thinking although it has been around since WW II, with Herbert Simon as its main proponent. Within EPPA, we have developed the debate on this discipline as a special topic.

An Epistemological Approach: academic quality is possible for all types of epistemological stands. However, some epistemological approaches are more accepted and popular, even if their relevance is under-developed. There are clear trends for the future in our epistemological approaches. It will be important for our main research institutes to have a critical mass of methodologies and a fair mix of all methods responding to different epistèmes. When moving towards a full range of epistemological approaches with their related methods and techniques, about five schools are emerging:

- A **mechanistic/physicalistic** method responds not just to the first decades of the twentieth century, with its scientific management, with the machine models and the engineer-driven authors. The mathematics of the systems were mostly algebraic with closed systems without context. It allowed for replications of practices. There were some degrees of development with operations research technologies which allowed a distant environment, unclear objectives and satisficing rather than optimising objective functions.
- There is the **scientific orthodoxy**, with a cause-effect modelling, allowing for hypotheses to be tested and conclusions to be generalised. Realities are transformed into data populations, with probabilities for statistical
testing in surveys. Dependent and independent variables are definable and defined. Context is recycled and corrected by concepts such as “outliers,” “noise” and error rates.

– **Critical realism** describes and explains mechanisms using case studies which could be very similar or very different. Contexts are made explicit. Thick descriptions allow for frameworks, modelling, trends, patterns.

– **Radical constructivism** relies on intersubjective and consensual interpretations. Realities can be defined as stories which are socially constructed as meanings. Language analysis is combined with participatory processes.

– Within the **Chaos Paradigm** we are in a field where everything is context, since the border lines are absent. This is the field of the known unknown and, even more, of the unknown unknown. It is the field of unmanageable wickedness. It is hoped that Monte-Carlo methodologies of simulations and random thinking could be helpful.

It will be important to combine all these methods, rather than reduce our vision on realities by selecting and focusing on one epistème, with its related and necessarily restricted approaches.

A Relevance Approach: this pragmatic approach refers to the supply and demand of PA knowledge. The most convenient zone is where some supply meets some demand. Here we can only move to have a closer and more intense interaction of supply and demand, where supply becomes an answer to the demand which raises a question. The other three zones are problematic. A first mismatch is the supply of knowledge by the PA community for which there is no demand. It triggers the reaction of “so what?”. We can have some of this, but not too much. And the key question is whether this research is just irrelevant or ahead of its time. A second frustration zone is where we have a clear question and an obvious societal problem but no supply of PA research. It is clear that some of the big questions, of the current paradigms, of for example big data related problems, are in this zone. Finally, and as a worst case scenario, there is a zone where we have no demand and no supply. This “terra incognita” is about a societal meteorite that will fall on us, and we are totally unaware of it; nobody saw this coming (for example, major parts of populations that feel abandoned, major migrations, ...).

A Self-Contained Approach: finally, a research strategy could just be very insular and myopic. It is just blindly or routinely driven by the existing data and the existing methods. It becomes an academic vortex which disconnects itself from reality and relevance. Most of this research output is “empty.”
3  Next Steps

This EPPA I project ended with the 2018 concluding seminar on the occasion of the EGPA conference at IDHEAP, UNIL, in Lausanne, where EPPA was handed over to EGPA as one of its strategic projects. It has been our ambition to show and map the diversity within Europe. This diversity is far from demonstrating incoherence. We explicitly emphasise the plural, “European Perspectives,” to cope with future challenges which are partly common, and partly contingent and path-dependent. As a complement to these common perspectives, we wanted to illustrate this diversity. In the end, we found much more diversity than expected. Our firm belief is that we should take this not as a weakness, but as a strength of PA in and for Europe. PA will become stronger if it acknowledges and uses the multitude of disciplines, cultures, futures and practices in European PA.

Of course, the questions we raise and the tentative answers we discuss are just a beginning, not the end. Our aim has never been to summarise a debate but to start a new one, and therefore our determination and goal have always been to repeat this exercise regularly, for example every 20 years, obviously inspired by the long-lasting success of the Minnowbrook initiatives, however critically one may look at some of their results and recommendations. So we are aiming for EPPA II in 2038, and EPPA III in 2058. The idea is to keep it alive by having a dialogue with the US-based Minnowbrook reflections, which we assume will continue with Minnowbrook IV in 2028 and Minnowbrook V in 2048. Ultimately, a broader dialogue of EPPA in Europe with other regional perspectives should be an ambition, i.e. with Asian Perspectives (APPA), MENA Perspectives (MENAPPA), African Perspectives (AFPPA) and Latin-American Perspectives (LAPPA).

4  Seven points to remember

It is impossible to summarise the EPPA I initiative, which proved to be more productive and fascinating than we had ever expected in our wildest dreams, in a few sentences. But still, we want to conclude with seven points to remember:

1. PA needs to keep an eye on the future and anticipate possible futures in research and teaching so as to be ahead of events.
2. PA needs to consolidate disciplines better and actively create platforms to integrate classical disciplines, including sociology, law and public policy expertise, but also new disciplines and fields of expertise such as
ICT and behavioural psychology. Institutionalisation of cooperation is of the utmost importance.

3. PA needs to be more serious and effective in taking culture into account. This is not just about the relevance of context, but much more about the impact of languages, religions, ethnicities and the increasing high diversity of populations.

4. PA needs to connect to practice better by focusing on different forms of knowledge, on different normative needs, a professional way of communicating, and by having scientists in residence at administrations.

5. PA needs periodically to take stock of its research and teaching, of its relevance and faults, to attract and keep its capacity for change.

6. PA should look for common denominators in Europe, but should at the same time appreciate the European diversities and make use of them to improve trends and directions within and across countries.

7. Europe needs more dialogue within its European PA space, but also outside that space with other regions of the world. This of course includes Minnowbrook, but even more the rest of the world.

EPPA I has been a first, feeble step in these directions, but we strongly argue and hope that EGPA will keep EPPA alive within its PA community.