



# EGPA and the Study of EU Public Administration

## EGPA Permanent Study Group 14: EU Administration and Multilevel Governance

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### 24.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH PROFILE OF PSG 14: MAIN TOPICS AND MAIN CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF EU PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Administration has always been a focal point of European Union (EU) research. Yet, the definition of the dependent variable, the explanatory models and general understanding of multilevel and EU administration have made substantive leaps forward recently. As one of the regulars of the Permanent Study Group (PSG) 14 put it in a prominent article on the field of enquiry, while ‘classical integration theories were insensitive to

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© The Author(s) 2019  
E. Ongaro (ed.), *Public Administration in Europe*,  
Governance and Public Management,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92856-2\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92856-2_24)

institutional dynamics and administrative intricacies, recent integration theories have moved considerably from *sui generis* theorizing towards applying generic approaches from PA (and elsewhere)' (Trondal 2007: 961). The trend Trondal observed in 2007, namely a shift to concentrate on interconnecting organisations, the autonomy of administrative agencies, the increasing network density across levels and administrative layers, and supranational and multilevel administration as cause for domestic administrative change have indeed been dominant inquiries dealt with in the past ten years, which set the scene for the dynamics in current scholarship. The foundation of the PSG 14 coincided with the acclaimed 'public administration turn' in EU studies.

The PSG 14 has since intensely followed and contributed to the most prominent debates, putting its central research interest on multilevel administration and public management in a broader public policy framework. In this context, special attention is given to the EU, which represents a particularly advanced, constantly evolving system of multilevel administration. Building on the trends away from all-embracing integration theories and linking EU research much more directly to standard public administration (PA) studies, the PSG seeks to advance the understanding of the evolving structures, actors and processes of EU multilevel administration. At the heart of the PSG's agenda is hence the accumulative knowledge of the first decades of PA research on the EU. Major themes have accordingly been, firstly, studies on the EU's core organisations, in particular the Commission, ranging from the early scholarly concern about the dichotomous role description of the Commission between political and administrative actor (Coombes 1970) to differentiated research on the internal working logic, power distributions and organisational logic of today's Commission (Kassim et al. 2013; Hartlapp et al. 2014). In addition, the study of administrative organisations has been expanded beyond the Commission's administration to other EU bodies, such as the European Parliament and the Council, and the inter-

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play between EU-level and member state administrators (Blom-Hansen 2013; Brandsma and Blom-Hansen 2015; Egeberg et al. 2014; Christiansen and Vanhoonacker 2008; Dobbels and Neuhold 2013; Schäfer et al. 2000). Secondly, the research on administrative autonomy has been a crucial area of interest, concentrating again on the Commission (Curtin and Egeberg 2008; Egeberg 2007; Trondal 2010) but has also and arguably more importantly moved attention to regulatory and executive agencies (Knill et al. 2016; Grønnegaard Christensen and Lehmann Nielsen 2010; Barbieri and Ongaro 2008; Egeberg and Trondal 2009; Yesikagit and Christensen 2010). Most recently, the concern with administrative autonomy has moved on to advance new methodology and insights to study autonomy of international secretariats (Bauer and Ege 2016). Thirdly, the mutual effects of change across levels of governance—say, Europeanisation—have been established as sub-field of research (Knill 1998; Goetz 2001; Knill 2001; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Kassim 2003). This area may be sub-divided into the two further related research foci, namely system creation (D’Orta 2003; Siedentopf and Speer 2003; Olsen 2003; Heidbreder 2011), which is also captured by the notion of a genuine type of multilevel administration. In addition, compliance research is often (but not exclusively) linked to Europeanisation approaches and has brought forth insights about administrative preconditions for successful policy implementation in multilevel systems. Compliance research has evolved from early attempts to explain non-compliance of member states mainly in transposing EU law (Börzel and Risse 2000; Héritier and Knill 2001; Green Cowles et al. 2001) to a very differentiated set of scope conditions and variable explanations under which policy implementation succeeds on the ground (Thomann 2015; König and Mäder 2014; Börzel and Heidbreder 2016). Finally, normative questions about multilevel administration have gained momentum and a prominent place in the PSG, concentrating above all on the question of accountability and legitimate rule in the EU (Bovens et al. 2010; Brandsma et al. 2016).

An additional development that resonates in the objectives of the PSG is the ambition to embrace both empirical approaches that document and explain the dynamics of the EU multilevel administrative system and approaches that focus on their (normative) implications. Whilst the focus of the study group is on the multilevel administration of the EU, it does not exclude innovative research on other types of multilevel systems, including federal policies or regional and global organisations. This also links to most recent trends in EU and multilevel administration research.

On the one hand, the attempts to link EU with traditional PA research have been conceptually advanced and are best reflected in the terminological and conceptual elaboration of multilevel administration as genuine form of administrative system (Bauer and Trondal 2015; Trondal and Bauer 2016; Benz et al. 2016; Grande and McCowan 2015). Debates on how to define theoretically and study empirically multilevel administration in the EU and the international realm more generally are ongoing and a debate the PSG is actively involved in. On the other hand, the above-indicated dynamic to produce more generalisable insights by conceptualising the EU not as *sui generis* but an instance of multilevel administration is currently further extended by research on international administration, including the challenging field of comparative international PA. Pioneering work has been advanced amongst others by one of the former chairs of the PSG 14, Michael Bauer, who stresses that ‘the relevance of international public administrations (IPAs) for global policy-making remains neither empirically nor theoretically well understood’ proposing a heuristic to facilitate ‘the development of concepts to systematically study patterns, constellations and conditions of IPA influence’ (Knill and Bauer 2016: 949, see also further articles in the same special issue; on the evolution of international PA research, especially Eckhard and Ege 2016). Building on the work in multilevel administration, the road ahead indicates hence further theoretical, empirical and normative questions about administration in increasingly de-territorialised policy-making conditions.

## 24.2 ORGANISATION AND NETWORK OF THE PSG: THE CONTRIBUTION AND IMPACT OF EGPA ON THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

The PSG 14 has been relevant in the above-outlined research development most directly by assembling a number of key authors on a regularly basis. The initiators of the PSG, Edoardo Ongaro, Michael W. Bauer and Andrew Massey, established the group with the very objective mind to give the field of research more visibility and have it advance in the first place. Initial focal points were *Management in Supranational Administrations, Horizontal and Vertical Administrative Interaction in the European Union*, as well as *Management Reforms in Supranational Organisations, Heterogeneity and Similarities in Multilevel Administrative Interaction, Supranational Law as Encouragement and Constraint, Theorising the Administrative Dimension*

*of Multilevel Governance*. Especially the last objective, advancing the theoretical and conceptual understanding of multilevel administration, was substantively co-shaped by the former and current chairs of the PSG.

The transfer of scholarly insights and exchange with practitioners was realised mainly by regular invitations of practitioners to the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) conferences. The link to practitioners is considered of special value. In order to strengthen the participation and interest of professionals in the PSG, the organisers have and will continue to contact potentially interested individuals directly who promise to be interested in a particular topic. The declared incentive of the PSG thus remains to enter an exchange between practitioners and researchers from which both sides can profit.

### 24.3 SHORT- AND MID-TERM AGENDA: THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH INTO MULTILEVEL ADMINISTRATION AND EU GOVERNANCE

The PSG has taken on the practice to select annual themes to complement the general research agenda of the group. The areas focused on and that will come up on the agenda are ‘representative bureaucracy in multilevel administration’, ‘New forms of governance’, ‘Comparative perspectives on multilevel administration’, ‘Closing the EU policy cycle: implementation and evaluation of EU policy’ and ‘Repercussions of multilevel administration: impacts on national organisation, practices and normative orders’. This list is indicative of the wide range of concrete questions the field of research is dealing with and still has to explore.

More generally, the PSG has been at the core of dynamics in the study of multilevel and EU administration. It has done so in at least three respects. First, the founders of the PSG managed successfully to establish and strengthen the area of research as a field in its own right. Whilst in the early 2000s questions about the (non) existence of a ‘European Administrative Space’ dominated the debate (Olsen 2003), the specific administrative lens is by now firmly established in EU research and is gaining momentum in the study of multilevel governance more widely. The road forward is clearly to further develop generalisable concepts and theories of multilevel and international administration. Second, the PSG has followed and mirrored relevant developments in the field of research, as outlined in detail in this contribution. The PSG has been an important platform for some of the key authors who advanced our knowledge in

multilevel administration. To keep up the regular participation of a wide variety of senior and junior scholars, to pick up new research trends and to shape the research questions of tomorrow remain a fundamental task of the PSG and EGPA. Finally, the EU is in considerable crisis, if not crises. A bureaucratic overload is often cited as one of the causes for citizens' dissatisfaction with the EU. But is this really the case? A closer link to practitioners and communication of relevant insights to a wider, non-academic public must remain a central ambition of the PSG, in order to make crucial insights on the conditions for effective and legitimate multilevel administration a fruitful undertaking.

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