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Comparative public administration

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## 1. *The subject matter(s) of Comparative Public Administration (CPA)*

To attain and agree upon an adequate understanding and definition of what public administration (PA) is all about has been an enduring concern in the academic debate on PA in general and on CPA in particular.

There has apparently been an early academic consensus that the triad of organization, personnel and behaviour is apt to adequately capture key components of PA. Tellingly early major CPA-related research was directed at organization (such as the “bureaucratic machinery of government” in Peters 1978), at personnel (such as “civil service systems” e.g. in Bekke et al. 1999, 2000) and at administrative behaviour (such as attitudes of administrative elites in Aberbach et al. 1981).

To analytically break up PA its different *operational functions* may be highlighted. For this, Luther Gulick’s famous POSORB( (acronym for Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Co-ordinating, Reporting, Budgeting) (see Gulick ) may serve to single out and identify planning units, personnel units, budgetary units etc as separate subject matters of CPA research. Similarly, New Public Management (NPM)-inspired concepts are prone to direct the attention of CPA research at administrative units and personnel in charge of performance management, controlling, evaluation etc..

Still another way to analytically “dissect” PA is by highlighting different *policy areas*, such as social administration, environmental administration, housing administration etc.

Another relevant dimension comes into sight of CPA research by envisaging, in the initial phase of the “policy cycle”, see Jann and Wegrich 2007, Brans 2012) the “politico-administrative relations” between the institutions and actors of administrative “core” administration, on the one hand, and political arena, policy

making and policy makers, on the other (see Peters 1988, Pierre 1995, Page 2003, 421; see the exemplary study by Aberbach et al. 1981).

Under the impact of neo-liberal policy-driven and NPM-inspired reforms since the 1980s the institutionalization of and relations between the public, private and “third” sector have undergone profound changes (see Wollmann 2018) that have enlarged the focus of CPA research.

For one, the previous dominance of the public sector in the provision of public functions has given way to institutionally disaggregate, “hiving off”, pluralize and privatize the conduct of public functions. By the same token, the institutional and functional distinction between “what is public and what is private has become increasingly vague” (Peters 2010, 3). Hence, the “agencification” (see Verhoest et al. 2012) and “corporatization” (see Grossi and Reichard 2018) of public functions, the formation of “mixed (public private) organizations (PPP’s) (see Vecchi/Hellowell 2018) as well as processes of “re-municipalization” (see Wollmann 2016, p.323 et seq.) have become “candidates” of CPA research.

In a similar vein, the “relations between administration and civil society” have been addressed as a relevant matter of CPA research (see Pierre 1995, Brans 2012, Page 2003, 421). Under the impact of recent fiscal austerity policies and the related retreat of public authorities from social service provision organizations and actors of the “third sector” (see Salamon and Sokolowski 2016) have come to play an increased role in this field (see Wollmann 2016, p 324 et seq.) and thus to attract growing attention in CPA-related research as well.

Finally mention should be made of the conceptual and empirical overlaps which CPA-related research may have with variants of policy research (Van de Walle/Brans 2017, 105). When applying the concept and metaphor of the “policy cycle” (see Jann/Wegrich 2007) with its distinction of the phases of

policy formulation, implementation and termination/evaluation, it becomes visible that public administration is intrinsically involved in and intertwined with all three phases. This holds true particularly, of course, for the policy implementation phase in which public administration is the key actor. But it also applies to the institutional and actor links with the policy formation phase (as mentioned above) as well as, at the end of the “cycle” to policy evaluation (and evaluation result-related information feed back loops and policy learning processes). So overlaps of CPA-related research can be recognized with policy research on policy formation (see above), with implementation research (see seminal Pressman/Wildavsky 1973, for overview see Saetren/Hupe 2018) and well as evaluation research (for overviews see Wollmann 2003, Jacob et al. 2015, Pattyn et al. 2018) and policy learning (for an overview see Dunlop and Radaelli 2018).

In sum, a broad panorama of aspects and dimensions of PA which reveal the great analytical potential of CPA research but also the entailing difficulty and challenge to follow suit with appropriately defined and agreed-upon “units of analysis”. However, no matter which institutional differentiation and contextual “fraying” of PA is taken into consideration, administrative (bureaucratic) “core” of public administration probably continues taking centre stage in CPA research.

### 1.1. Territorial variation

In view of the multi-level structure which characterizes politico-administrative systems another important distinction in the study of CPA follows from its location of PA at different government levels (see Raadschelders/ Vigoda-Gadot 2015, 461 et seq. , Peters 1988, 3 et seq.)

Consequently several types of comparisons can be discerned.

- (*Horizontal*) *cross countries* comparisons aim at studying the chosen subject matter (administrative units, personnel etc, as spelt out in the antecedent section) depending, within the multi-level structure, on the territorial level (central, regional/meso or local) under consideration.
- (*Vertical*) *cross countries* comparisons are targeted at studying administrative phenomena in the *vertical* setting of and relations between the (multi) levels of government, such as vertical “silos” or vertical “interwovenness” (*Politikverflechtung*). In EU member states the vertical interaction etc. between EU authorities and national/subnational units could also be target of such cross country comparison.
- The analysis of administrative functions/sectors in several countries can also be classified as (horizontal) cross country comparison if focused solely on one function/sector. By contrast one might speak of (conceptually and methodologically) distinct type of *cross policy* comparison if several policies/sectors as such are compared, be it in one or in several countries.

### 1.2. *Variance over time.*

(Longitudinal) cross time analysis aims at studying a specific administrative phenomenon (for instance the organizational, personnel or territorial etc profile of public administration) in its development “over time” in order to find out whether and which changes have taken place and to possibly identify the factors that have impinged upon the development.

## 2. Problem of “conceptual equivalence”

CPA the researcher is typically and crucially faced with the problem of “conceptual equivalence”, that is, with the challenge to make sure that the constructs and terms used in the research have the same meaning across different countries or even in different regions of the same country (see

Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, 827), in other words, whether “phenomena in different countries that apparently go under the same label are actually the same thing” (Pollitt 2011, 121).

## 2 *Historical development of CPA research*

In the following a brief account of the history of CPA research shall be given. (For overviews see see Farazmand 1996, Pollitt 2011, 116 et seq., Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2014, 446 et seq., , Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, 6 et seq.). Hereby the focus will be on the historical development while the more recent phase (since the 1970s) will be documented (and bibliographically referenced) in chapter 4 on the “state of CPA research.

In a historical perspective, the academic occupation with public administration can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany when in the Prussian king established professorships in Cameralism (*Kameralwissenschaften*) at newly created universities (in 1723 in Halle and Frankfurt) with the aim to train a new class of public administrators in the (then elementary) scientific knowledge to be applied in the administrative operation of the agricultural, manufactural etc. matters of the mercantilist State. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the “Science of the State” (*Staatswissenschaften*) followed suit (Kickert and Stilman 1996, 66). Its most prominent protagonist was *Lorenz von Stein* (1815-1890) who, in defining administration as the “working state” (*arbeitender Staat*) and in advocating that the study and teaching of public administration should constitute an “integrating science” by comprising, besides administrative law, sociology, political science and public finance, can be considered a German forerunner of administrative science (see Sager et.al. 2018, p. 101). However, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century the academic dealing with public administration became all but entirely dominated by legal positivism and lost the interdisciplinary and empirical orientation of *Staatswissenschaften*. It was essentially linked to and identified with administrative law which in Germany prevailed essentially unto the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century numerous US American students visited German universities (Halle, Heidelberg and Berlin) and attended lectures on *Staatswissenschaften*. Among them were *Herbert Adams* and *John Burgess* who became teachers of *Woodrow Wilson* and *Frank Goodnow* (see Sager et al. 2018, 31 et seq.). So Germany's *Staatswissenschaften* somewhat influenced the emerging academic study of public administration in the US.

*Woodrow Wilson* (1856-1924) who in 1887 wrote his seminal article entitled "The Study of Administration" (Wilson 1887, reprinted in Otenyo/Lind 2006) can be regarded the intellectual founder of "public administration" as an academic discipline. He advocated four basic concepts, to wit, separation of politics and administration; comparative (sic!) analysis of political and private organizations ("nowhere else in the whole field of politics... can we make use of the historical, comparative method more safely than in this province of administration"); improving efficiency with business-like practices and attitudes toward daily operations and improving the effectiveness of public service through management and by training civil servants, merit-based assessment. Besides his plea for comparison his call for the separation of politics and administration has been the subject of a lasting debate.

In the ensuing academic debate about the profile of Public Administration (PA) the dominant doctrine of a dichotomy between politics and administration led at first to treating administration narrowly as an "isolated" sphere shaped by its own internal *principles* and immune to influences from the outside. At the same time, in its initial narrow understanding the study of US public

administration (Public Administration!) was perceived and conducted without almost any “comparative” look beyond.

CPA as a disciplinary (comparative) research field took off in the US after World War II with a focus on development administration which was significantly fostered by the funding from the Ford Foundation and its programmatic goal to support developing countries in the then ongoing process of decolonization. In 1954, the *Comparative Administration Group (CAG)* that, under *Fred Rigg’s* leadership, was established in 1954 within the American Society for Public Administration (the latter was founded in 1939), became a driving force in the evolution of CPA with *Fred Riggs* (1917-2008) and *Ferrel Heady* (1916-2006) as the two influential protagonists. In 1966 Heady published his pioneering book “Public Administration. A Comparative Perspective” (which reached its 6<sup>th</sup> ed. in 2001). While further emphasizing a practical “developmental” orientation Riggs pleaded for the study of CPA to be „empirical, nomothetic and ecological“, that to shift from an ideographic (distinct cases-based) to nomothetic approaches and by seeking to explicitly formulate and test propositions to aspire some “grand theory” of public administration (see Riggs 1962, 116).

During the 1970s the CPA research declined as the Foundation funding petered out and the interest of the governmental development agencies in promoting such research receded. Besides, “the strongest disenchantment derived from unfulfilled scientific promises or the failure to produce a general theory of administrative systems” (Brans 2003, 427, see also Farazmand 1996, 343).

Towards the end of the 1970s two publications stood out in focusing on bureaucracy as a prime target of CPA research. For one, in 1978 Peters published his “Politics of Bureaucracy” (which reached its 6<sup>th</sup> ed. in 2010 indicatively with the new subtitle “An Introduction into Comparative Public Administration”) highlighting the organisational fabric of public administration.



Moreover in 1981 Aberbach et al. published their comparative work on “bureaucrats and politicians in Western Democracies”. In falling in line with the “behavioural revolution” which social and political science experienced during the 1970s and characteristically pursuing a quantitative methodological approach, was directed at attitudes and “behaviour” of politico-administrative elites.

Since the early 1990s the pace of CPA research began to quicken (see Pollitt 2011, 118 et seq.). The further development of CPA was marked by a differentiation of subject matters and sub-fields within the larger discipline. Three factors and events that have driven the development of CPA since the 1980s shall be briefly highlighted while more detailed information can be gathered from the overview of the sequence and body of pertinent publications rendered below in chapter 4.

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For one, several waves of public sector reforms have provided a challenging agenda for CPA. Since the 1980s the massive drive for public sector modernization that got underway world-wide under labels of “re-inventing government” (in the US) and “New Public Management” (arising in and spreading from the U.K.) and has inspired multiple CPA research and publications (see Pollitt/Bouckaert 2017, Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2019).

Second, after 1990 the secular transformation of politico-administrative structures in ex-post Central and Eastern European countries triggered a wave

Third, mentioning should be made of the *European Group for Public Administration* (EGPA) which has played a pivotal role the expansion of CPA in Europe and beyond (see Pollitt 2011, 123) reminiscent of the crucial importance that the *Comparative Administration Group* (CAG) had in the US during the 1950s and 1960s in the proliferation of CPA. EGPA was, founded in

1975 within the *International Institute of Administrative Sciences* in the wake of a conference that was held in 1968 at the (then) Academy (now University) of Administrative Sciences in Speyer, Germany. *Fritz Morstein Marx* who, returning from the USA, was a forerunner of CPA in Germany (see Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2019, 6, Sager et al. 2018, 86) was instrumental in initiating the 1968 Speyer conference as well as in founding EGPA.

### 3. *Research design and methodology in CPA research*

CPA-related research is meant, generally speaking, to analyse administrative phenomena and to explore the factors that have caused them. Hence, as in any piece of social and political science research, CPA-related research is faced with a threefold methodological challenge and task. First, it has to single out and define the subject matter under study, in other words, the “what” of its investigation or, in methodological terms, the “dependent” variable or *explanandum*. Second, it is held to identify the factors that have (causally) swayed on the “dependent” variable, in other words, the “why” or, in methodological terms, the “independent” variable or *explanans*. Third, it has to ascertain a research method that is apt and adequate to validly identify (“explain”) the (causal) relations between the “dependent” and “independent” variables in play.

#### *Dependent variables (explanandum)*

In view of the real world of public administration the multifaceted complexity has been pointed at in chapter 1 CPA research is confronted, as first move, with the task to analytical stake out and define the subject

matter it targeted at. In the pertinent research literature a promising step in this direction is seen in construing “analytical building blocks” (see Aberbach and Rockman 1988, Peters 1988, Pierre 1995, Brans 2003, 431) which is designed to analytically “cut out” a segment of the complex reality of PA and to narrow it down to a “researchable” set of variables. For instance, Peters 1988 has proposed four such “building blocks”: “public employees, public organizations, bureaucratic behaviour and politico-administrative relations” while Pierre 1995 put forward three, to wit, “intra-organizational dynamics of bureaucracy, politico-administrative relations and relations between administration and civil society”. While the concept of “building blocks” is certainly useful to analytically reduce the complexity of PA to a “researchable” stretch and size, the various schemes which have been proposed by Peters, Pierre and others point at an inherent analytical uncertainty perhaps even bordering arbitrariness. Besides, they hardly assist and guide the researchers to arrive at adequately define their “unit of analysis”. Tellingly, on the heels of proposing an “analytical building block” Pierre himself noted that “to be sure we do not have any analytically useful definitions of some of the key phenomena in this field” (Pierre 1995, 6).

So, any piece of CPA research is faced, from the outset, with the crucial task to adequately define its “dependent variable” and “unit of analysis”.

### *Independent variable (explanans)*

In a social science research design the selection of the “independent” (explanatory) variable would ideally be guided by (theoretically deduced and empirically testable) hypotheses about the causal relations in play. However in the absence of a body of theoretically deduced and empirically sufficiently corroborated knowledge about the causal

relations in question empirical research can at best be “heuristic” or “exploratory” in (inductively) generating (tentative) hypotheses.

To identify factors and “independent” variables that might feed into such “exploratory” CPA research sundry social and political sciences debates may be drawn on.

For one, conceptual guidance may be gained from the debate on variants of *neo-institutionalism* (for an overview see Peters 2011, Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2019, 44 et seq.). Among the pertinent variants *actor-centred* (or rational choice) institutionalism (see Scharpf 1997) emphasizes the influence of decisions and interests of relevant political and economic actors on the institutional development. In *historical* institutionalism the influence of existing institutional structures and past traditions on institutional change and choice is writ large to the point of creating “path dependencies” (see Pierson 2000). According to *sociological* institutionalism the institutional development may significantly hinges on the cognitive and socio-cultural acceptance, adaptation and translation by the actors involved. Finally, *discursive* institutionalism highlights the discourses and dominant ideas impinging on institution building (see Schmidt 2008). In a similar vein, normative isomorphism stresses the sway of ideas and concepts (see DiMaggio/Powell 1991).

Moreover, (political as well as “societal”) *culture* has been proposed as a key explanatory factor by Peters 2010 albeit cautioning that “political culture is a difficult concept to isolate and measure precisely” (ibid. 35). Furthermore, the *ecology* as the complex environment and contextuality has been highlighted as a determining set of variables by Caiden/Caiden

1990 following up on Riggs 1962 who was an early advocate of the “ecological” emphasis.

Lastly, internationalization and *globalization* which has questioned the traditionally predominant role of the national state in influencing the politico-administrative structures has been called out as driving politico-administrative developments (see Farazmand 1999, Chandler 2014)

### *Comparative methods*

In view of the scarce conceptual and methodological guidance of CPA research the search for and application of appropriate methods is crucial for the pursuit of CPA research.

As in social science at large CPA research disposes essentially of two methods to attain or approaching causal analyses and interpretations, that is, the quantitative-statistical method based on aggregate and survey data and the qualitative method largely based on case-studies. While, as the “classic” rule of thumb has it (see seminal Lijphart 1975, 686), the former hinges on the “few variables many cases (large N)” constellation the latter is typically premised on “many variables, few cases (small N)” situation.

### *Quantitative statistical approach.*

In the past the applicability of quantitative-statistical methods has been limited in research on public administration (PA) in general and CPA in particular. It has been employed in research in which behaviour, attitudes, values etc. of administrative actors (individuals) have been studied, typically on the basis of surveys (see Aberbach et al. 1981). However, recently the employment of survey-based research has been advancing in

large-scale international comparisons (see Verhoest et al. 2012, Hammerschmid et al. 2016, for an overview see Verhoerst et al. 2018 ).

### *Qualitative approach.*

Following from the “rule of thumb” of “few cases/ few N many variables” qualitative case-studies have prevailed in CPA research. For conducting such research two different comparative methods are in play.

For one, a comparative method that was originally proposed by Przeworski/Teune 1970 (see also, Lijphart 1975) is premised on the (as it were, quasi-experimental) logic that in the selected cases should in as many possible variables similar if not equal (*ceteris paribus*) so that the (“causally”) relevant variables in question should, in the methodological lingo, be “controlled” (For a detailed discussion of the two pertinent research strategies, i.e. the *most similar systems* design, MSSD, and the *most different* systems design, MDSD, see Raadschelders/ Vigoda-Gadot 2015, 460 et seq.). While the “quasi-experimental” logic on which the MSSD and MDSD formulas are premised are theoretically compelling it has shown, in the practice of comparative research, that it is virtually impossible to create the kind and degree of “*ceteris paribus*” conditions required for a rigorous application of the quasi-experimental logic (see Pollitt 2011, 121)

Second, comparative qualitative research may be undertaken as a conceptually reflected “multi cases” strategy (see Eckstein 1975). Based on case studies (and its typical research tools, such as interviews, site visits, document analysis etc.) it provides analyses of the “thick description” kind (see Raadschelders 2011, p. 831 et seq., Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, 6). Moreover qualitative case research may lead to

“serendipity” (Merton 1957, 103 et seq), that is, to “unexpected findings” that stimulate new hypotheses or modify existing ones. However if carried out as a single case study such research is limited its analytical and explanatory potential as it is bound to arrive at “ad hoc explanations” that cannot be “generalized” beyond the single case at hand, By contrast, a “multi cases” strategy has the analytical potential of attaining explanations and generalizations that may lend themselves to formulate valid statements of the “middle-range” sort.

However, the analytical potential of a “multi-cases” strategy in qualitative research hinges on the “purposive sampling” or “purposeful selection” of the countries (cases etc.) (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, p. 823, van de Walle/Brans 2018, 110: for a detailed discussion of “purposeful sampling” in qualitative research see Patton 2002, Suri 2011). In contrast to the sheer compilation of the countries under study by “convenience”, for reasons of “practicality” (easy accessibility, language skills etc.). if not by accident, purposive (or purposeful) sampling aims at selecting (opposing) countries (or cases) by certain criteria and features reminding of the “quasi-experimental” logic (see above). Accordingly it is expected, by holding (“controlling”) specific features constant, to narrow down the number of variables and to (more easily) single out the analytically relevant variables.

### *Typologies*

At this point the typologies of countries and country groups presented in the available literature may come into play (for an overview Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, table 2.1., Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2015. p. 432 et seq.). For instance in a typology proposed by Painter and Peters (2010) the distinction is made, with a global outreach and with “legal tradition and state society relationship” used as the typology-constituting

criteria, between nine country groups: Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic, Scandinavian, Latin American, Postcolonial South Asian /African, East Asian, Soviet and Islamic. In a recent book on European administrative systems by Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2019) the combination of “administrative tradition and political-institutional features of administrative structures” is used as typology-building criteria thus arriving at five types of European administration: Continental European Napoleonic, Continental European federal model, Scandinavian Anglo-Saxon model and Central Eastern and South-Eastern European model. (For a slightly different typology of European administrative systems see Ongaro et al. 2018, p. 15 et seq.).

As typologies are construed by grouping (and possibly subgrouping) countries (or cases) by certain features and criteria (see Jreisat 2005, p. 232) they may serve, in applying (comparative) purposive sampling, to select opposing countries (for instance, following Painter and Peters 2010, “Napoleonic” versus “Germanic” or, in line with Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, Continental European versus Central Eastern European countries) in order to find out whether “this makes a difference” with regard to the variables under study and to possibly make corresponding (causal) inferences. In a similar vein, typologies may give clues how to proceed in other studies by way of “purposive” selection..

#### *4. Development and state of CPA research. An overview.*

In this final section an overview and assessment of past research and publications in the field of CPA shall be attempted. It draws, for one, on a recent review article by Fitzpatrick et al. 2011 (covering 151 articles published in 28 PA-relevant journals between 2000 and 2009) as well as on an article by



Pollitt 2011 (reviewing CPA-related books and journal of the last three decades)<sup>1</sup>.

Second, it bears on the subsequent overview and listing of CPA related book publications which, besides naming the author(s), identifies the respective subject matter and country coverage.

An early set of CPA publications dealt with the (bureaucratic) organization of PA such as seminal monograph by *Peters* 1978 (reaching its 6<sup>th</sup> until 2010!) and the volume by Rowat ed. 1988 (on “public administration in developed democracies”). Another focus was on bureaucratic elites with (meanwhile “classic”) study by *Aberbach et al.* 1981 (on “bureaucrats in Western democracies”) taking the lead and followed by *Pierre* ed. 1995 (“bureaucrats and politicians” in: US, France, Germany UK, Japan, Sweden, Kenya, Tanzania) and *Page and Wright* 1999 (on “bureaucratic elites” in: Western European States). Thus CPA research on “Western” countries and “developed democracies” prevailed during the 1980s notwithstanding exceptions such as *Dwivedi and Henderson* ed. 1990 (“public administration in a world perspective”). and *Farazmand* ed. 1991 (“Handbook of Comparative and Development Public Administration”).

In the early 2000’s public personnel and civil service systems became a major target and area of CPA research with a remarkably wide regional outreach. It comprised (West) European (see *Bekke and van der Meer* eds. 1999, 2000 and later *Demmke/Moilanen* 2013 - on 27 European countries!), Central Eastern European (see *Verheijen* ed 1999), Anglo-American (see *Halligan* ed. 2004) as well as Asian countries (see *Burns/ Bowornwathana* 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> For earlier reviews on CPA-related publications in pertinent journals see *Sigelman* 1976 (covering articles up to the mid-1970s), *Van Wart/Cayer* 1990 (reviewing 253 CPA articles between 1982 and 1986) and *Derlien* 1992 (dealing with PA research undertaken in Europe between 1980 and 1990).

Since the 1990s another stream of CPA- related research has been unleashed by the New Public Management (NPM)- inspired public sector/administrative reforms that have been propelled in OCED countries. Promoted in part by OECD initiatives and World Bank and EU funding CPA-related research was at first mainly targeted at the central government level and addressed various segments of public sector reforms, such as such as Peters et al. ed. 2000 (on core executive in: 12 countries), Peters et al. ed.2006 (on advice to government, in: 8 European countries), Verhoest et al. ed. 2012 (on public agencies, in 29, mostly EU, countries) and Hammerschmidt et al. eds. 2016 (on public sector reforms, in; 17 European countries).

Recently CPA-related research on subnational/local developments has been significantly propelled by the EU-funded COST programme on “local public sector reforms”. It lead to the formation of a major international research consortium which conducted extended collaborative research and resulted in a sequence of CPA-relevant publications, such as Kuhlmann/Bouckaert eds, 2016, Wollmann et al. eds. 2016 (on public service provision: in EU countries), Grossi/Reichard 2016 (on local level “corporatization”: in European countries), Lippi et al. eds. 2019 (on public service provision: in South European countries). Mention should be made also of the “global report” commissioned and published “United Cities and Local Government” (UCLG). In a global coverage that groups the countries in global “regions” (such as Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and the like), the “global report” also provides CPA-relevant information on local administrative systems (see UCLG 2008).

After 1990 the post-communist transformation in Central Eastern European (CEE) countries triggered an upsurge of CPA-related research which was significantly promoted by World Bank and EU funding. It focused largely on the on the central government level: see Verheijen/ Coombes ed.1998 (on “innovation in public management. Perspectives from East and West”, in: 6

CEE countries and 4 West European countries), Nunberg et al.1999 (“on administrative transition in CEE countries”), Verheijen 1999 ed. (on “Civil Service Systems in Central and Eastern Europe”) as well as, mainly based on primary case study research: *Dimitrov et al.* 2006 (on the institutions of central government” in: Hungary, Poland, CR, Bulgaria). For CPA relevant studies regarding the local level see the CEE-related chapters in Wollmann et al. ed 2016 and Kuhlmann and Bouckaert eds. 2016

Because of the institutional and functions links and overlaps between administrative core operations and evaluation and NPM-inspired performance management pertinent studies are significant contributions also to CPA-related research. See *Lankina et al.* 2006 (on the administrative performance of local authorities, in: Poland, CR, Hungary, Russia) and country reports in Kopric et al. 2018, for an overview of performance management see van Dooren and Hoffmann 2018.

### *Summarizing assessment*

The *subject matters* of CPA research range widely in reflecting the multifaceted and fragmented reality of public administration (as spelt out in chapter 1), such as “core executive”, “agencies”, “corporatization”, public services provision” etc. (for a thematic classification of types of CPA research see Pollitt 2011, p. 120, table 1, for a similar thematic typology of CPA research see Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, p. 6. Table 1.1). However the various proposed sets of “analytical building blocks” (see Pierre 1995, Brans 2003) expected to be broken down and translated into “researchable” definitions of “units of analysis” have so far hardly borne fruition as Pierre concludes that “to be sure we do not have any analytically useful definitions of some of the key phenomena in this field” (Pierre 1995, 6).

In their *country coverage* the overview shows a preponderance of European countries which appears increasingly prompted by the advances of EU-funded

research. At the same time the scope of European (in particular EU member) countries has been enlarged by including other OECD (such as Japan and Australia) in part bolstered by OCED initiatives and World Bank funding. CPA research on developing countries scarce and downright lacking regarding East Asian and Subsaharan African countries which stands in stark contrast to CPA research in the Post WWII period with its focus on developing countries (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, 824).

As to *methods* in the overview *qualitative* (case-study based) research prevails. Similarly Fitzpatrick et al. 2011 observed that some 66 percent of the reviewed articles were premised on qualitative research. The preponderance of qualitative research holds true particularly for research conducted on a small number of countries and typically based on primary research (interviews, site visits, etc.) mostly done the researchers themselves (in the above list research of this type is marked by *italics*, for examples see Dimitrov et al. 2006, Lankina et al. 2008).

*Quantitative-statistical* (particularly survey-based) CPA research which in past provided the empirical base for a third of the pertinent publications (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, 825) appears to recently have gained further ground not least thanks World Bank and EU funding (for an overview see Verhoest et al. 2018, for examples see Verhoest et al. 2012, Hammerschmid et al. 2016).

At the same time, like other fields of social and political science research, CPA-related research has moved towards methodological pluralism and “method mix” in bridging and levelling the divide between qualitative and quantitative research (see Peters 2016, Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, p. 8).

As to the conceptual guidance of the *selection* of countries (and cases) – in the distinction between “purposive” (that is conceptually reasoned) selection and “convenient” one (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, 826, see above chapter 3). The assessment of the methodological quality, as to whether “convenient” (based on “practicality” etc. or “purposive” (bearing on “conceptual reasoning”), largely

depends on methodological rigour one applies. If one judges by the methodological stringency applied in comparative method of the most similar or most different design Pollitt's cautioning observation comes to mind that "most of comparative PA... does not follow much of this formula" (Pollitt 2011, p. 121). However, if one settles with a methodological less rigorous and somewhat "softer" understanding of the comparative method and assumes that it is "good enough" to distinguish, group and oppose countries (and cases) by certain features and criteria to allow analytically fruitful comparisons the scope of "purposively" guided CPA-research becomes much wider. So, probably sharing such methodologically "softer" view Fitzpatrick et al. 2011 observed a "frequent use of purposive sampling" (ibid.826). By the same token in a significant number of the above listed research projects and publications has a "purposive" selection plausibly been applied that, for instance, within the entire sample of European countries Western and Central Eastern have been discerned and opposed in analysing and attempting to "explain" institutional variance (see Wollmann 2016, p. ). Thus, "softer" versions of "purposive" selection appear apt to fruitfully guide (basically qualitative) "multi case" strategies (see Eckstein 1975).

### *Organizational variants of CPA research*

The overview of CPA- related publications indicates that research is carried out in two organizational variants, to wit, either by a "standing alone" researcher or research team or in consortium-type collaboration with others.

In the former variant the researchers usually deal with a limited number (say, up to 5) countries (or cases). Their work is typically based on a commonly agreed upon research and mostly on primary analyses. At the end, as a rule, stands a co-authored monograph (in the above overview marked by *italics*). It appears that, by ensuring conceptual consistence and collaborative discipline, this organizational form of research has by and large achieved valid results.

If directed at a larger number of countries (or cases) the research is mostly carried out in a collaborative format with the participation of researchers from the countries under investigation. The results of such collaborative research is usually published in edited volumes in which, in what has been called a “sandwich” format (see Derlien 1992, 290), the main body of the book is made up of chapters by the participating researchers on their respective country (or case), while the introductory and a concluding chapter, mostly written by editor(s), are meant to spell out a common conceptual frame respectively to summarize the findings of the collective research. However such edited volumes which make up the lion’s share of hitherto published CPA-related research have typically been criticised for “rather than consisting of comparative chapters on selected topics they mostly consist of a series of country chapters” (Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, 826, see also van de Walle/ Brans 2018, 110), thus providing “descriptive” or, in Derlien’s distinction (see Derlien 1992, 301), at best “comparable” rather than “comparative” results.

In order to enhance and ensure the comparative potential of “collaborative” research two organizational variants come in sight. For one, besides committing the participant research from the outset to an agreed-upon research concept the research consortium should be set for an adequate duration (of several years) and make it point to periodically hold interim workshops in order to conceptually coordinate and “discipline” the participating researchers in the conduct of their individual work and in finally writing their individual chapter for the edited book. While this organizational format is likely to increase the conceptual consistence among the various contributions and chapters it still runs the risk that the book results in a sequence of (loosely, if at all connected) single country (or case) reports.

In another organizational variant of comparative research the participant researchers should, instead of each dealing individually with a single country or

case, “team up” to work on a specific subject matter or sector within the joint agreed-up comparative cross-country scheme. Such organizational format of subject-specific “teamed-up” research should ensure conceptually coordinated and disciplined research on the subject matter/sector at hand and should, through periodical interim meetings during the duration of the consortium, lend itself to feed the subject/sector results into the formulation of “generalized” conclusions hopefully of the “micro theoretical” or “middle range theoretical” sort (for attempts to conduct such “teamed up” comparative research see chapters in Wollmann and Marcou eds. 2010 as well as in chapters in Kuhlmann and Bouckaert eds. 2016 and in Wollmann et al. eds. 2016).

### *Textbooks and Handbooks*

A strong indicator of the recent dynamic development in the field of CPA can be seen in the rising number of editions (and re-editions) of pertinent textbooks and handbooks. So the seminal textbook by Peters on “The politics of bureaucracy” that was published first in 1978 saw its 6<sup>th</sup> (!) edition in 2010. In 2014 Kuhlmann and Wollmann published an “Introduction to Comparative Public Administration” which has a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 2019. In 2015 Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot put forward a voluminous monograph on “Global Dimensions of Public Administration and Governance”. The “Handbook of Public Administration” edited by Peters and Pierre first in 2003 went into its revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 2011. In 2018 the monumental two-volume “Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe” coedited by Ongaro and van Thiel came out with many CPA-related chapters. And finally in 2019 an “Encyclopedia of Public Administration” coedited Peters and Thynne will be published. No doubt, CPA has entered the limelight of international attention and visibility.

## *Data bases*

The expansion of CPA research has been supported by the increasing availability of academic data collections and the emergence of cross-national datasets created by the OECD and The World Bank. Exemplary is the OECD's "Government at a Glance" which, published since 2009 and updated lately in 2017 (see OECD 2017), provides data and comparisons on the performance of public administration in 40 OECD countries and beyond (see Van de Walle/Brans 2018, 105, on related validity and reliability issues see Brans/Pattyn 2017).

In recent years also in university-based CPA research efforts have been stepped ups to collect their own data (see Verhoest et al 2018, van de Walle/Brans 2018, 109). Exemplary are the University Leuven-based COBRA data base (on the COBRA supported survey on agencies see Verhoest et al. 2012) and well as the EU-funded COCOPS consortium (for its survey on top public executives see Hammerschmidt et al. 2016)

## *5. Summary and perspective*

In its current state and in future perspective CPA and CRP research present an ambiguous and mixed picture.

On the one hand, in view of the complex and multifaceted reality of public administration CPA research has so far analytically captured and depicted only "excerpts" and "bits and pieces" of the real world of PA. So, small wonder, it has generated valid insights of the, as it were, "micro-theoretical" or at best "middle-theoretical" sort and has thus, no doubt, fallen short of any "grand theory" which the early protagonists of CPA, such as Heady 1962, envisaged (see Jreisat 1975, Peters 1988, Brans 2003, 427).. Uncertainty reigns concerning the appropriate research method to apply in the comparative analysis



at hand, particularly regarding appropriate sampling which is “one of the most important methodological issues in comparative work” (Fitzpatrick et al. 2011, 826). The multiple conceptual, theoretical and methodological challenges are enhanced by the transdisciplinary approach CPA research often embarks upon (see Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2015, 443, Pollitt 2011, 115, Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019, 7). Drawing on several subdisciplines of the social sciences (political science, sociology, law, economics etc.) entails the consideration of different disciplinary approaches and methods. In sum, “there seems little prospect of convergence on any single theory or methodological approach” (Pollitt 2011, 114). On the top of it, CPA research is faced with the thorny problem of “conceptual equivalence”, that is, whether a specific term has the same meaning in different national etc. contexts or whether a certain phenomenon has the same term in different national languages and contexts. In a similar vein it has to cope with the “travelling problem”, that is, with the limited transferability of concepts and terms between different language-related and cultural contexts (see Peters 1996).

On the other hand, CPA research has in recent years moved towards and arrived at a phase of remarkable disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) consolidation and productivity. This development of CPA research is based on impressive growth of its “infrastructure” in terms of national and international professional and academic associations, related national and international research networks, multiple publication outlets, national and international funding sources, databases etc.. It is not least the recent boom of editions and re-editions of CPA-relevant handbooks and text books testifies this growth. Notwithstanding its methodological, conceptual and theoretical shortcomings and limits and despite its fragmented and “excerpted” analytical capture of field of public administration CPA research has generated an enormous and still growing body of research findings and also of research experience on which not only further empirical work but also further theory building can lean. Thus, notwithstanding

its various shortcomings and limits CPA has attained a “considerable vitality” (Pollitt 2011, 114 ) and has become “quite competitive .... and mainstream” (Pollitt 2010, 763, see also Kuhlmann/Wollmann 2019, 6).)

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