The Public Administration turn in Integration Research

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Abstract

This article highlights how the study of public administration is brought back into the study of European integration and European Union (EU) governance. The public administration turn in integration research has brought generic insights into the broader field of public administration but has also brought theories, concepts and hypotheses from public administration into the field of integration research. The purpose of this overview is less to provide a complete picture of the public administration turn in integration research, but rather to reveal the varied and rich research agendas, and to stimulate further research. This public administration turn highlights (i) the impact of the formal organisation of core-executive institutions such as the European Commission; (ii) the conditional autonomy of sub-ordinate administrative units such as EU-level agencies; (iii) the integration of multilevel administrative systems through collegial structures such as EU-level committees; and (iv) the external penetration and differentiated impact of EU-level institutions on domestic public administration. The lack of systematic knowledge about the impact of administrative structures within EU-level and domestic public administration is thus steadily reduced.

Introduction

The study of international organisations and public administration (PA) have largely become separate scholarly realms (e.g. Cox and Jacobson 1973; Simmons and Martin 2003). Since the classic administration school of Luther Gulick (1937) up to recent PA and comparative government literature (Olsen 2006), scholars have largely dealt separately with domestic PA and international executive institutions (IEIs) (e.g. Reinalda and Verbeek 2004; Rhodes et al. 2006). National and international administrative orders are often portrayed as two separate systems with rather few intersections (Jachtenfuchs 1997: 2). This article highlights how the study of PA is brought back into the study of European integration and European Union (EU) governance (hereby labelled integration research (IR)) (see also Tallberg 2006). The purpose of this overview is less to provide a complete picture of the PA turn in IR, but rather to show the varied and rich research agendas currently under way, and to stimulate to further research. Moreover, there is a deliberate bias in this review article towards recent literature.

The 1990s saw a growing interest in PA in IR, for example by the burgeoning literature on IEIs generally (Trondal et al. 2005) and research on EU institutions and the European Commission (Commission) particularly (Keeler 2005: 571). In the field of PA the 1990s also witnessed mounting attention to European integration, signified with the launching of the European Forum in the journal *Public Administration*. The PA turn in IR has brought generic insights into the broader field of PA but has also brought theories, concepts and hypotheses from PA into the field of IR. In short, IR scholars have increasingly gravitated towards PA by asking PA-style questions and using PA toolkits to answer them. Whereas classical integration theories were insensitive to institutional dynamics and administrative intricacies, recent integration theories have moved considerably from *sui generis* theorising towards applying generic approaches from PA (and elsewhere). The PA turn in IR scholarship highlights (i) the impact of the horizontal and vertical organisation of core-executive institutions such as the Commission; (ii) the conditional autonomy of sub-ordinate administrative units such as

EU-level agencies; (iii) the integration of multilevel administrative systems through collegial structures such as EU-level committees; and (iv) the external penetration and differentiated impact of EU-level institutions on domestic PA as well as the filtering effect of domestic institutions, administrative cultures, traditions and histories on this "EU effect". More generally, the multilevel institutional embeddedness of PA in Europe is highlighted. Thus, the lack of systematic knowledge on the impact of administrative structures within domestic and EU-level PA (Olsen 2006) has been steadily reduced. However, whereas PA scholarship has increasingly affected IR scholarship, the future ambition of IR should be to become a net exporter of theoretical concepts and empirical insights into the generic field of PA.

This stock-taking exercise covers the following substantive fields: Section I introduces studies of the Community core-executive – the Commission. Section II explores the parallel administration of the Community – EU committee governance. Section III discusses the emerging administrative spaces represented by EU-level agencies. Finally, section IV offers a brief overview of the literature on Europeanisation of domestic PA.

The Community Core-Executive: the Commission

The Commission represents one of the most mature and powerful IEIs world-wide (Trondal et al. 2005). The Commission occupies a pivotal role as the core-executive EU institution with key initiating powers that runs the everyday administration of the Union. The idea of establishing an autonomous community executive was codified in Article 157 in the Treaty of Rome. Yet, beyond single-case studies there is a surprising dearth of theoretically informed empirical studies of the Commission. The autonomy of the Commission remains largely unexplored, contributing to contradictory assessments of it (Kassim 2004). The Commission is seen as rifted between member-state dominance (Kassim and Menon 2004; Wonka 2007), concern for the collective European good (Haas 1958), Directorate-General (DG) supremacy and portfolio concerns (Cini 1997), as well as professional independence (Haas 1992). Academics,

politicians and Commission officials seem to have different views of what the Commission is and what it should be (Durand 2006). Commission reform programmes, such as the Kinnock reform package, also have had ambiguous effects on the Commission; however, overall reducing member-state dominance with respect to organisational setup, recruitment, actual decision-making processes, etc.

Commission governance has been measured differently in the literature. Suggested yardsticks include (i) organisational traits of the administrative services that transcend the territorial principle of organisation (e.g. Egeberg 2006), (ii) the recruitment of Commissioners and Commission Administrators (e.g. Egeberg 2006; Wonka 2007), (iii) the socialisation of Commission officials towards supranational loyalties (e.g. Hooghe 2005), and (iv) role dynamics among member-state officials attending Commission expert committees (e.g. Egeberg et al. 2003). For example, studies of the recruitment of Commission officials (Egeberg 2006) and studies of the behavioural dynamics of the College of Commissioners (Egeberg 2006; Smith 2003) picture the Commission as guided by portfolio concerns together with collective concerns and responsibilities largely outside member-state influence. Moreover, studies of political attitudes among top Commission officials view these attitudes as mainly based on nation-state (socialisation) processes, thus severely challenging Commission autonomy (Hooghe 2005). Studies also indicate member-state influence on the appointments of Commissioners (Wonka 2007). Finally, a vast literature pictures the Commission as increasingly integrated, fused and meshed with national government systems through committees, networks and agencies. Network models of the Commission view this European core-executive as the hub in an emerging multilevel administration. Network models also tend to view the Commission as lacking autonomy by being integrated into webs of external institutions, actors and processes (e.g. Hofmann and Turk 2006: 583). Moreover, the fusion approach by Wolfgang Wessels (1998) also highlights the mutual integration of the Commission and domestic government systems. However, this approach views integration as more automatic than revealed in empirical studies of the mutual penetration and co-ordination of the Commission and

domestic ministries and agencies (e.g. Kassim et al. 2000). For example, one prerequisite for deep interpenetration of government systems seems to be administrative fragmentation (Spanou 1998: 471).

Decision-making processes in the Commission are shown to be strongly biased by the horizontal organisational structures of the Commission, accompanying poor co-ordination between units and DGs (Stevens and Stevens 2000). The Commission is horizontally organised into 28 DGs and several hundred units that compete for influence and resources. Different DGs have developed idiosyncratic sub-cultures, *esprit de corps'* and institutionalised perceptions of appropriate problems, solutions and expertise (Bellier 2000; Shore 2000). One implication is bureaucratic segmentation (Lequesne 2000: 45). A core claim of Hooghe (2005) is that socialisation of Commission officials mainly occur at the national level and less within the Commission. By contrast, Shore (2000) shows clear evidence of socialisation processes among Commission officials inside the Commission apparatus. According to Shore (2000: 131), there are evidence of "a strong sense of community and *esprit de corps* among staff – even among new recruits". Hence, current research disagrees on the transformative clout of the Commission to redirect behaviour and re-socialise Commission staff.

Whereas previous studies primarily studied permanent Commission full-timers, Trondal (2007) unpacks one under-researched laboratory within the Commission: Seconded national experts (SNEs). SNEs may serve as a critical test of Commission autonomy because they are recruited to the Commission on short term contracts and have a contractual limitation on their stay. Trondal (2007) demonstrates that SNEs evoke a triangular behavioural pattern that is dominated by portfolio, epistemic and supranational dynamics. The suspicion early voiced by Coombes (1970) that SNEs are highly conscious of their national background is thus challenged. A long lived assumption in the literature has been that the "secondment system would tend to produce an unmanageable cacophony" of officials loyal to the national civil service

(Cox 1969: 208). The fact that SNEs are more supranationally than intergovernmentally oriented should be seen as a *crucial test* of the clout of the Commission. SNEs also evoke decision-making behaviour similar to that of the College of Commissioners and permanent Commission officials (Egeberg 2006). The College of Commissioners, hired on temporary posts to the Commission, strongly emphasise portfolio concerns by underscoring the importance of their own DG (Egeberg 2006). Due to their organisational position at the top of the Commission and due to their sectoral portfolios Commissioners tend to evoke departmental and supranational behaviour (Egeberg 2006). Recent research also indicates that permanent Commission officials evoke fairly strong supranational behaviour, reflecting the socialisation of Commission officials over time (e.g. Shore 2000 131). These observations draw attention to the astonishing primacy of departmental (or portfolio) dynamics both at the apex of the Commission (among the College of Commissioners) as well as at the substructure of the Commission (among SNEs). The portfolio dynamic therefore seems paramount within the Commission, though, supplemented by supranational and epistemic dynamics.

The Parallel Community Administration: EU Committee Governance

What role do national civil servants play in EU executive governance? Research on EU-level committees aim at understanding how domestic PA and EU executive governance is gradually and increasingly intermeshed, interconnected and interlinked. "The EU is distinctive among international organisations in locking in its member into a continuous policy-making process…" (Wright 1996: 149).

Faced with an increasing agenda overload, one strategy available to the Commission is to import a large number of external specialists and experts in preparing initiatives and drafting new legislation. Committees are 'generic features of modern political life', important venues for regulative decision making and important arenas where national

and supranational decision-makers meet, interact, persuade, argue, bargain, adapt, learn and re-socialise. Hence, decision-making within EU committees also pertains to the less acknowledged aspects of actor socialisation and re-socialisation, identity change and role-play.

Only recently have scholars begun investigating systematically *the many faces* of EU committee governance (Egeberg et al. 2003). For example, Beyers and Trondal (2004) compare Belgian and Swedish civil servants who attend the Council working groups (CWPs) and demonstrate how *diverse domestic institutional constellations* accompany different degrees of supranational orientation among these officials. The Beyers and Trondal study reveals that Belgian officials are more supranationally oriented than Swedish officials because different state systems and administrative arrangements.

Recent research confirms that EU committees are sites of vertical and horizontal fusion of administrative systems and policy instruments (Maurer and Larsson 2002). Trondal (2006) demonstrates that EU committees serve as a vital component of a parallel community administration that cross-cut existing administrative borders of the member-states and the EU. The attention, energy, contacts, co-ordination behaviour and loyalties of national civil servants are to a considerable extent directed towards the Brussels committee system. The decision-making and agenda-setting processes within national governments are increasingly integrated into the EU agenda setting phase (Larsson and Trondal 2006). However, Trondal (2006) also shows that the re-socialising and transformative powers of the EU committees are heavily filtered and biased by the national institutions embedding the EU committee participants. Last, but not least, the institutional autonomy of this parallel community administration seems stronger within the Commission than within the Council and the comitology setting (Egeberg et al. 2003). Hence, the picture of one unified parallel community administration has to be sacrificed for the model of a multifaceted community administration that balances multiple - partly overlapping - dynamics.

CWPs and the Council Secretariat have become important executive institutions parallel to the Commission (Christiansen 2001: 149). Faced with stronger executive powers of the Council, the executive functions of the Commission are increasingly challenged. Research demonstrates that the intergovernmental Council has important supranational traits by developing shared norms and collective identities. The Council has institutionalised small supranational and deliberative 'clubs' within and around COREPER and the CWPs (e.g. Lewis 2005). Supranational dynamics are revealed to be stronger in the CWPs than in the agenda setting Commission expert groups among those officials who interact and socialise fairly intensively and informally (Egeberg et al. 2003). This observation was also made by Haas (1958). He claimed that, "the Council pattern of compromise is far more federal in nature than would be indicated by the customary practices of intergovernmental conferences" (Haas 1958: 524). Egeberg et al. (2003) also demonstrate that deliberative dynamics are not omnipotent within the comitology committees as asserted by Joerges and Neyer (1997), but that the Commission expert committees have stronger deliberative *modus operandi*. They thus seriously challenge sweeping generalisations of administrative fusion and bureaucratic *engrenage* (Wessels 1998) by demonstrating the different decision-making dynamics within Commission expert committees, CWPs and the comitology committees.

Towards European Administrative Spaces? EU-level Agencies

There is a dearth of research on EU-level agencies in the IR literature. Studies of EU-level agencies are foremost centred on analysing agency establishment and reform (e.g. Geradin and Petit 2004; Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2003). Moreover, the vast majority of the agency literature is centred on domestic agencies in general and US federal agencies in particular (e.g. Pollitt et al. 2004). At present, only some few studies offer primary data on the actual decision-making dynamics unfolding within EU-level agencies. Empirical studies of domestic agencies observe unintended consequences of establishing agencies (Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2003), reduced political control and

accountability (Christensen and Lægreid 2006), increased agency autonomy vis-à-vis the Parliament and partisan politics (Shapiro 1997), and vis-à-vis the ministry level (Döhler 2003).

The agency fever in the EU attracts increased scholarly attention. The study of EU-level agencies made a quantum leap after the Special Issue on EU-level agencies of *Journal of European Public Policy* in 1997 (Vol. 4, No. 2). A burgeoning literature portrays EU-level agencies by different images, notably as autonomous administrative spaces, Community institutions, and multilevel network administrations. Whereas the White Paper on Governance (2001) pleas for stronger Commission control on EU-level agencies, a recent Commission White Paper on EU regulatory agencies (2005) pleas for increased agency autonomy. Finally, EU-level agencies are pictured as hubs in an emerging multilevel union administration that is characterised by administrative networks, fusion and *engrenage* (e.g. Egeberg 2006).

EU-level agencies are increasingly seen as multilevel network administrations that contribute to a subsequent Europeanisation of domestic agencies (Eberlein and Grande 2005). For example, there are strong indications of autonomisation of networking agencies in the case of the Italian antitrust agency (Barberi 2006). The linking up of national agencies to the Commission in unitary states like Sweden and Denmark (Egeberg 2006) is indicative of multilevel networks of government(s) where EU-level agencies serve as the central node. The intimate participation of domestic agencies in the activities of EU-level agencies is partly coerced and partly optional, accompanying perceptions among domestic agencies of administrative competition from the various EU-level agencies. Increasingly, the multilevel networking of EU-level agencies is formalised and contractualised, thus institutionalising these networks as multilevel administrative spaces.

Secondly, EU-level agencies serve as Community institutions by being integral components of the larger EU apparatus. "…The Commission has played a key role in

[the] establishment [of EU-level agencies], and has often seemed reluctant to see its children grow up and become truly independent" (Jacobs 2005: 7). According to this second model, the organisational borders between the Community institutions (notably the Commission) and the agency level are blurred, both to the observers and to the decision-makers themselves. According to Hofmann and Turk (2006: 592), EU-level "[a]gencies integrate national and supranational actors into a unitary administrative structure…".

Finally, EU-level agencies could be seen as a vital component of am emerging administrative space in Europe. To constitute an administrative space a certain amount of agency autonomy is required. The concept of the 'European Regulatory State' views EU-level agencies as taking on a life of their own by having *de facto* considerable leeway, substituting system unity with institutional diversity. Agency autonomy is conceived both in formal legal terms and with respect to actual decision-making processes (Moran 2002).

Bringing these images of agency governance together, Trondal and Jeppesen (2007) demonstrate that EU-level agencies indeed combine all three governance models mentioned above. Trondal and Jeppesen (2007) also reveal that EU-level regulatory *and* non-regulatory agencies tend to blend all three models of governance. Hence, agency governance seems only marginally affected by the regulatory – non-regulatory dichotomy. One explanation is that the dichotomy between regulatory and non-regulatory agencies is ambiguous.

The Europeanisation of Domestic PA

During the last decade, the transformation of executive governance in Europe has been studied as the Europeanisation of domestic government and governance. The 1990s witnessed a scholarly turn from studying EU institutions and politics towards analysing of how the EU "hits" the constituent units (the member-states) (Graziano and Vink

2006; Keeler 2005: 570). Contemporary studies under the heading 'Europeanisation' are basically concerned with how EU institutions and politics impact on the member-states' institutions and policies (e.g. Bulmer and Lequesne 2005; Featherstone 2003: 6; Schuppert 2006). Despite major conceptual disagreements and ambiguities (Featherstone 2003), the main research interest seems to be how Europe hits home. This literature mainly concludes that we are not witnessing a profound transformation of administrative structures and styles, legal rules, cultures, and collective identities (Olsen 2007). Most studies suggest that adaptation towards Europe is considerably mediated through and conditioned by existing domestic institutions, practices, cultures and traditions, thus contributing to a differentiated Europeanisation of domestic PA (e.g. Kassim et al. 2000; Spanou 1998). Similar conclusions are drawn in the study of the new member and candidate states (Sedelmeier 2006).

Beyers and Trondal (2004) suggests a middle-range approach to the study of Europeanisation by highlighting how domestic PA 'hit' the EU. Nation–states 'hit' Europe in different ways and to different degrees depending on how they are formally organised. By studying domestic civil servants attending the CWPs they illuminate that Belgian civil servants are more supranationally oriented than Swedish officials, mostly due to different domestic institutional constellations. This model focuses on those primary institutions at the domestic level that mould the representational roles of government officials, bearing in mind that EU institutions poses additional cues for supranationalism. The Beyers and Trondal study (2004) supports the general insight that domestic PA filters and mediates processes of European integration writ large. As governance levels increasingly interact, what happens at one level affects substantially what happens at other levels. Despite the complexity involved in processes of administrative integration in Europe, most studies suggest a rather "incomplete arrival" of the "EU-effect" (Schuppert 2006: 62).

Studies of Europeanisation reveal that heads of government play a central role in the domestic EU business, that national parliaments occupy a weak but steadily stronger

role in domestic EU governance, that turf-wars occur between foreign ministries and sector ministries, and that domestic subordinated agencies are fairly autonomous when handling EU affairs (e.g. Kassim 2005). The "EU effect" may for example contribute to strengthen and centralise the state and the civil service (e.g. Beyers and Bursens 2006), or to fragment the state and the civil service (e.g. Kassim 2005). However, recent research also demonstrates forcefully the multiple roads that lead to the differentiated processes of Europeanisation, accompanying different worlds of Europeanisation (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). Notably, the institutionalist and social constructivist schools reveal how the "EU effect" is filtered and mediated through pre-existing domestic institutions, rules, norms and cultures (e.g. Hèretier et al. 2001). For example, the EU seems to affect and mobilise regional governments more strongly within federal states like Belgium than within unitary states like Sweden (Beyers and Bursens 2006; Beyers and Trondal 2004), for example with respect to the size and powers of regional offices in Brussels (Marks et al. 2002). Larsson and Trondal (2005) also explore how differentiated Europeanisation of domestic PA is caused by the differentiated formal organisation of the EU itself. Larsson and Trondal (2005) demonstrate that the Commission mainly strengthens the lower echelons of the domestic government hierarchies, notably professional experts within sector ministries and agencies. By contrast, the Council of Ministers mainly strengthens domestic politico-administrative leadership, the Foreign Office and the Prime Ministers Office. Multilevel interaction of administrative systems between the Commission on the one hand and domestic PA on the other occur largely outside the control of the domestic politico-administrative leadership. However, this tendency is to some extent counterbalanced by the sectoral interlocking effect of the Council of Ministers.

Conclusion

The PA turn in IR has brought generic insights into the broader field of PA. This scholarly turn highlights the impact of the formal organisation of core-executive institutions, the conditional autonomy of sub-ordinate administrative units, the

integration of multilevel administrative systems through collegial structures, and the external penetration and differentiated impact of EU-level institutions on domestic PA as well as the filtering effect of domestic institutions, administrative cultures, traditions and histories. Moreover, the PA turn has brought added insights with respect to conditions for institutional change and persistence, the role of deliberate design, the prospects for the co-existence of multiple, overlapping, co-evolving and conflicting governance dynamics, the emergence of multilevel administrative systems that challenge existing patterns of democratic steering and accountability, the concurrent existence of administrative co-ordination and fragmentation, as well as actor-level identity and role change. Hence, the lack of systematic knowledge about the impact of administrative structures at the domestic and EU level has steadily been reduced.

Still, empirical puzzles remain to be solved. The first puzzle is the coming together of moderate institutional changes and fairly radical policy changes in PA (Olsen 2007). The second puzzle concerns the co-existence of radical system changes at the EU-level and moderate system changes at the domestic level of PA. The third puzzle has to do with whether fundamental system transformation occur within PA in Europe, or whether administrative reforms merely represent minor adjustments within existing politico-administrative orders (March and Olsen 2006: 14). Theoretically informed empirical studies should assess and account for puzzles of these kinds.

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