

# Refounding the state: public administration at the heart of political reform

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IN THE AGE OF GOVERNANCE, PUBLIC ACTION HAS BECOME A JOINT AFFAIR. State institutions no longer have a monopoly on the definition or implementation of public policies. Non-state actors have acquired legitimacy as necessary partners in public regulation and they increasingly conduct their action in this field.<sup>1</sup> At the same time they raise their voice to gain recognition in their capacity both as beneficiaries and users of public services. Such a development entails a redefinition of the role of the state which has to learn how to interact in a different manner, outside the hierarchical framework, with the other actors (organised civil society, private sector, local authorities) and the citizens. A governance-driven approach thus implies the necessity for the state to be re-founded. The state must, with the participation of a range of actors in public action, evolve in its *modus operandi* and its legitimation model.

This relativisation of the role of the state has developed alongside neo-liberal theories that seriously called it into question. Under the guidance of the Public Choice school of thought that dominated American political science in the seventies and eighties, the state came to be thought of as a brake on societies' development. The structural adjustment plans conceived and imposed by international institutions from the eighties thus contributed in no small measure to the breakup of public administrations. Conducted along a threefold agenda of "openness, deregulation, liberalisation", the withdrawal of the state, was to be effected to the advantage of the private sector, considered more virtuous and more effective. Civil society organisations also got entrusted with a more significant operational role in public policies. However, for want of reinforcing state efficiency, these reforms contributed to weaken its capacity to regulate public affairs and to fulfil its role in the provision of public services; hence its effectiveness was undermined.

This recognised, reinforcing the state was again perceived as a necessity towards implementing policies answering effectively the citizens' aspirations and needs. Thus the state became again an essential pillar of public regulation, no longer an obstacle but a catalyst enabling the countries' economic and social development. This rehabilitation was further reinforced and extended in the context of the current economic and financial crisis which owes a great deal to lack of public regulation. Furthermore the role of public institutions is also considered an essential factor for political stability. It is a fact that conflicts and situations of fragility are closely connected with the absence of institutions the capacity of which is well established and recognised by the

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1. See in this publication the article by Claire Launay-Gama and Pierre-Yves Guihéneuf, "The search for influence, dialogue and social control: what kind of discussion forums for state and non-state actors?"

population. And finally, the role of the state is key to facing up to the environmental challenges and to building the answers they require into a long term strategy.

But in order for the state to be able to act effectively, it has to be re-founded, bringing particular attention to its model of interaction with society. This represents a major field of work for the IRG. This article will lay out its main axes. To begin with, the Institute has chosen to reinforce its understanding of public administration, all too often left out of analyses of governance whereas it is a key element in the implementation of public policies and a vital linkage between a government and its citizenry. Furthermore the implications of governance force the administration to readapt in order to interact better with the diverse actors henceforward involved in public policies. It is accordingly necessary to understand the reforms being implemented, the way they may bolster an effective administration and the way to back them. The IRG has pursued in parallel its analyses regarding the evaluation of public action. This evaluation now has to be undertaken by multiple actors, within the public space and with a view to transform policies. It is thus part and parcel of the process of re-foundation of the state. The latter's good working order is finally closely linked to the issue of competence, and thus of education and training for actors in public action. The IRG pursues here its critical thinking on the transformations necessary to education and training in public affairs. It seeks to slant them towards governance, whether as regards their audience (no longer restricted to public servants only) or the competences to impart (beyond technical expertise, towards upgrading mediation know-how in preparation for multi-actor exchanges).

### **Leaving behind a technicist approach and acknowledging the political dimension of public administration reforms**

In many countries, and this in every geographic zone, public administration is being reformed with a view to reinforce its capacities and improve the management of its human resources in order to make it more professional and more citizen-friendly. However these reforms have, by all accounts, been followed with mixed results. In order to understand them better and to get to the bottom of their failure, the IRG has undertaken, along with the French ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and the DGAFP (General Directorate of Administration and Civil Service) an inter-ministerial and multi-actor critical thinking process on the question of support to public administration reforms. The interministerial working group and the workshops set up in several countries aimed to bring out concrete experiences and better to identify the issues at stake in administration reform (see box below). What are the lessons to be drawn from

the inadequacies in current practices? What are the new directions to adopt in order to sustain the development of more effective and legitimate administrations?

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### **How can national reforms around public administration be supported from the outside?**

#### **A critical thinking process for French development cooperation**

The Institute for Research and Debate on Governance, the French ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE), and the General Directorate of Administration and Civil Service (DGAFP) came together in 2010 in order to reflect on transforming cooperation practices in the field of public administration reforms. The objective was to figure out intervention principles liable to support more legitimate reforms, anchored in their local context and thus making them more effective.

Facilitated by the IRG, this reflexion exercise was envisaged as an inclusive process, bringing in most of the French public institutions active in the cooperation sector under the heading of public administration reform. The first phase of the process consisted in thematic meetings, bringing together in Paris representatives from French public institutions for administrative cooperation in discussion with academics, private sector operators and officials from beneficiary countries. The discussions brought out the issues, the challenges and some action principles arising from an integrated approach to state reform. In the course of a meeting in January 2011, the multilateral cooperation outfits, public and private operators and civil society organisations were brought in. For the second phase of the process and on a proposal from the IRG, three workshops were organised from September to November 2011. Getting an input from the actors involved in cooperation programmes was meant to improve the knowledge of cooperation practices in the context of public administration reform and to gather some concrete proposals in order to develop them. Banking on exchange and the spontaneity of the contributions, these workshops convened a limited number of participants hailing from vastly diverse socio-professional and geographic backgrounds: administrations and civil society, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, academics and private operators.

Three workshops for three continents and three contexts: The first took place in Bogota, (Colombia), taking in the Andean region, with the participation of actors from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela. It gave a flavour of the strong politisation of administrative – and more broadly state – reforms in the region notably against a backdrop of cultural pluralism. The second was held in Conakry (Republic of Guinea) and brought out all the problems posed by reforming the administration in a context compounding political crisis with weak institutional capacity. Finally the third took place in Belgrade (Serbia) and addressed public administration reform through the singular prism of adhesion to the European Union. This process will result in the drafting of a French cooperation strategic orientation document regarding public administration reform.

Marion Muller, IRG

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Arriving at a conclusion already shared by many, this critical thinking process stressed the importance of steering clear of the hitherto prevailing technicist approaches to reform. They were essentially founded in institutional and normative transfer and focussed on a quest for efficiency, performance and cost reduction. The Western models of “good” administrative management (notably the private sector-inspired “new public management”<sup>2</sup>) – and largely idealised in the process – were then put forward as the universal response to adopt towards a fully functioning administration. Hardly any thought was given to the question of the administration’s effectiveness, namely its being recognised and “used” by the populations and actors in the countries concerned. These reforms, forced through at breakneck speed in order to bring a change in practices and administrative culture in the short term, have often proved little more than formal and cosmetic reforms (boiling down to a slew of legislation only patchily implemented). They complied more with international injunctions and codes than with the expectations of the local populations. This is clearly highlighted by Bob Bonwitt and Pauline Greco in their article concerning the process of adhesion to the European Union of Balkans and Central and Eastern-European countries. They show how the pressure for speedy results regarding the transposition of “community *acquis*” is achieved to the detriment of more substantial administrative reforms. The experience of cooperation in the European Union also bears out the fact that the longevity of reforms hangs before all on internal factors, on the actual needs of the actors concerned and on there being a national demand.

As the exchanges in the interministerial group reminded us, even in their technical dimension, reforms always have broader repercussions in terms of balance of power and logic of power, whether at organisational level, within the administration or at the more global level of relations between the government, the administration and the non-state actors. Administrative reforms are thus first and foremost of a political nature and bring into play a vision of the state (its role and its form) and of a country’s mode of governance. Accordingly, if they do not belong in a shared political project, there is little chance that they will be appropriated by the actors meant to implement them. They then tend to become an end in themselves or a pretext. However a growing number of actors think that administrative reform ought to be

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2. “New public management” stresses both internal managerial improvement to administration and the introduction of market mechanisms to implement public policies. For instance it advocates a management by objectives designed to make the operatives aware of their responsibilities. Reforms undertaken in this framework have had mixed results; cf. Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

part of a vaster project of re-foundation of the social contract. The IRG incidentally proposes to focus some thinking on a better understanding of how to reinforce the interactions between public institutions and the state. How can an administration be made more attuned to the people and more responsible towards them? How can the administration be made the vector of a public and democratic regulation? The construction of such an administrative democracy<sup>3</sup> is, for instance the object of the “open government” implemented by Barack Obama in order to make his administration more approachable, more transparent and more participative. Thomas Bryer makes a first appraisal in his article of these institutional innovations largely based on the use of new technologies, while drawing some broader lessons from the experience. He stresses that they are a factor for the reinforcement of democracy but also registers the methodological problems arising from their implementation as well as the risk that these schemes remain purely cosmetic and contribute to weakening even more the citizens’ trust in their administration.

It is therefore crucial to think and act taking the reforms’ global dimensions into account. The meetings set up by the IRG have shown that their success depends on a strong political drive (leadership) indispensable to convince and reach beyond the resistances to change and unresponsiveness that may prevail within the administrations. Such leadership must be collective and built on the basis of alliances and coalitions between the actors of change be they state or non-state actors. But beyond this, public administration reform requires the involvement of the citizens. They are, after all, the administration’s first interlocutor and we would do well to ensure that it answers their needs and their expectations. They must therefore be at the heart of the reform. If they are not involved, feel no ownership and do not legitimate the reform of their own public administration, it will not be possible to implement it in a satisfactory way. It is thus more and more generally accepted that administration re-engineering must be conducted starting first and foremost from the populations’ problems and needs. The administration’s institutional blueprint must be devised starting from that objective, pragmatically, in order to adjust it in the best possible way to every one of its functions. Besides, the introduction of the citizens and non-state actors into the reforming process allows to throw the debate wide open, to bring in new ideas, and new issues. This openness prevents the reform from being confiscated by an elite, from being self-serving, becoming its own end purpose. The implication of the citizens and of a broadened range of actors (civil society organisations, private

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3. La démocratie administrative, *Revue française d'administration publique*, n° 137-138, 2011.

sector) is therefore essential in order to build a broad consensus around the reforms and adapt them better to needs and expectations. Finally, such consensus allow for a better match between all the actors' representations and mindscapes in a given society and the symbolic universe and values vested in the administrations. A dimension the more important since the symbolic function of the institutions (which are vested with meaning by the populations) is essential to comfort their legitimacy<sup>4</sup>.

### **How can administrative reforms be sustained?**

A better understanding of public administration reforms also allows for a reflection on the modalities of support that can be offered to them by external actors. Cooperation agencies wield considerable influence on the reforms undertaken by Southern or transition countries. Through the important funding they provide they are a driving force; and in practice, they tend to get their conception of reform to prevail and to weigh in on national policies.<sup>5</sup>

The critical thinking process on the support to reforms of public administration facilitated by the IRG came to the conclusion that these agencies should, among other things, be more mindful of the political nature of the reforms, recognise the centrality of the state in managing its own development and the necessity of citizens' participation. They should also consider the reforms' rhythm, their logic and stages that cannot be imposed from outside. The added value of the cooperation actors rests then with their ability to *accompany and support the* devising and implementation of the reforms.

The priority here is to start from what is already there and to rely on local competences and personnel. External expertise must not therefore act as replacement but on the contrary contribute to the training and capacity building of local actors. Relying on existing – notably university and expert– resources, cooperation actors may also contribute to a better knowledge of local contexts and their political economy. The analysis of the socio-political and organisational trends structuring local administrations' operation (and notably their “informal” regulatory models) is indeed prerequisite to the devising and implementation of reforms grounded in local contexts. In their capacity as third party, external actors also have a decisive part to play in setting up and facilitating the dialogue between all the stakeholders in administrative reforms.

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4. See in this publication the article by Séverine Bellina “Diversity in Search of a State: legitimate democratic governance in the making”.

5. Charles POLIDANO, “Why civil service reforms fail”, *Public Management Review*, vol. 3, n° 3, 2001.



Let us also point out here that the relevance of their interventions is enhanced if they too belong in a partnership drive between public actors, civil society organisations, and private operators. This supposes a cooperative action in synergy with the range of national stakeholders.

### **Evaluation as a process for the transformation of public action**

The reform of public action raises the question of its own analysis and of its evaluation. The latter takes on a particular significance when set in the framework of governance. It cannot be reduced to an *a posteriori* technical and quantitative measurement of the impact of public policies, to a stale exercise to get through post implementation. It supposes on the contrary an ongoing process over a certain period and an openness to non-state actors. This multi-actor dimension of evaluation which brings together public policies' designers and beneficiaries is at the heart of the work on governance evaluation practices coordinated in Latin America by the IRG in partnership with the Universidad de los Andes.<sup>6</sup> The authors scrutinise here the relevance and the usefulness of institutional evaluation as a tool in the service of governance.

In its approach, the IRG shows how the evaluation must be devised according to the political and social contexts, with the objective to change and transform public policies. The evaluation is part and parcel of the reform process and of its effectiveness. It allows for the necessary adjustments as and when, and, more importantly, broadens the public debate concerning reform. The very objectives of evaluation cannot thus be confined to measures against predefined indicators. The evaluation must be conducted within a broader dynamics of collective and institutional learning, designed to get practices to evolve. It must therefore, in order to be owned by the actors in public action, be conceived of collectively from the outset. Its results will then need to be disseminated and subjected to discussions between all the stakeholders. The article by Raoul Blindenbacher and Bidjan Nashat proposes an example of one such innovative practice. Having noted the extreme complexity of public decision mechanisms (linked both to the very operation of the politico-administrative system but also to the growing involvement of non-state actors), they highlight the difficulties governments experience in learning from the past and eschewing old mistakes. This being the case, how can governments optimise their knowledge in order to meet the challenges of public action? The authors introduce here the concept of the

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6. Claire LAUNAY-GAMA et Monica PACHON, *Prácticas de evaluación de la gobernanza en América Latina*, Bogotá, Universidad de Los Andes, 2011. This work follows up on a seminar organised by the IRG in Bogota in 2008 entitled "Evaluation of Public Institutions in Latin America".

“governmental learning spiral”, aimed at organising a collective learning process concerned with specific issues of public action. It represents for them a precise, flexible and upgradable methodological and operational tool liable to foster public policies better suited to their contexts and problems.

### **Reforming governance education and training**

Finally, the reform of public institutions unavoidably raises the question of human resources. Many analyses point to the inadequacy and undervaluing of public servants’ competences as significant factors in administrative inefficiency. The many training courses dispensed to resolve these problems often prove unequal to the task. They don’t usually allow for administrative capacity-building on the long term and even less for the creation of a society-oriented administrative culture. They rarely partake of a long-term prospective vision of administration, for the simple reason that that vision hardly exists at all. They may also be out of step with the administration’s human resources management practices which are often conditioned by identity, clientelism or patronage. So that very often training courses are an end in themselves and, in the words of a participant to the Guinean workshop, are “more likely to answer personal whims than real needs”. Now, to be effective and have an impact in the long term they must belong in the framework of a more comprehensive politico-administrative project as illustrated by the case of the French National School of Administration (ENA) created in 1945 to produce an administrative elite able to lead the reconstruction post World War II. Bolivia has adopted a similar approach with the setting up of a Plurinational Public Management School in the framework of President Evo Morales’s political project. (see box below.)

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#### **Intercultural and multi-actor public management: a priority for Bolivia’s Pluri-national Public Management School**

In Bolivia, public institutions must take into account the indigenous communities’ experience of public management. To this end, Evo Morales’ government has adopted the principle of an “intercultural public management” that should allow a “transparent and respectful dialogue” between and with the communities around questions of development and public action. Such a prospect demands of the administrations a thoroughgoing overhaul of their public action methodologies, practices, and management tools. Now such public management in co-production with the user/citizen and in partnership with a host of non-state and public actors cannot fail to have a considerable impact on the competences and the training required from public service workers – hence the necessity to set up a specialised education and training school.

Created by presidential decree 15 July 2009 the Plurinational Public Management School (Escuela de Gestion Publica Plurinacional – EGPP) is intended to meet these needs. It has set itself the goals to contribute to the emergence of a culture of public service and professional values shared throughout the Bolivian state services, to bolster administrative efficiency in the framework of the new “pluri-national” public management paradigms and finally to develop social organisations’ capacities towards exercising a “relevant and efficient” control over the quality of the public services on offer and the democratic participation to public life.

The IRG will take part in the setting up of a research programme on governance within the EGPP. It will share in the critical thinking around the creation of a “Bolivian barometer of governance” and in the development of tools for the evaluation of public action fitting in with local needs and the context.

Laurent Contis, EGPP, and Claire Launay-Gama, IRG

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Education and training schemes are facing another challenge: they must adapt to the evolutions in governance models. The broadening of the range of actors involved in public action and the new democratic institutional framework require new capabilities for the management of public action. This is at the very core of the reform of the schemes of education and training for public affairs in Andean countries (see box below). Finally as the example of the IGAC (Institute for Governance in Central Africa) in Cameroun shows (see following box), the offer of training is in itself an important vehicle for changing public action practices. With this in mind the IRG continues its activity in the field of training for governance and is developing to this end a more structural offer of training. For instance, the Institute is involved in the devising of multi-actor training curriculums in Central Africa in the framework of a project in partnership with the Francophonie’s University agency (AUF).

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### **Reforming the offer of public affairs education and training**

#### **The case of the Andean countries**

In Andean America, in the framework of current state reforms, the notion of public affairs has become an issue for the whole society. It involves as of now new non-state actors and diverse decision levels answering to new regulation formulae. Confronted with these reforms, current public affairs officials must adapt and often modify their methodology and their thinking framework. Now, existing public affairs formation and training courses do not always meet these transformational needs.

In order to delve into that question, the IRG and Science Po Paris’s Master in public affairs conducted in 2010 a comparative study on public affairs education and training in Andean America<sup>1</sup> in collaboration with researchers from research centres and universities in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia. In Colombia it was piloted by

the Externado and National Universities; in Ecuador by the Latin American Social Sciences Institute's laboratory of research on Governance, In Bolivia by the Pluri-national Public Management School (EGPP).

The study stressed the difficulties found in adapting public affairs education and training to the needs of Andean countries' societies and states. The authors single out certain challenges for a better imbrication of the courses with state transformations. First among them come the discrepancies between the training currently on offer and the new governance practices brought in the region. Often narrowly matching international efficiency criteria, the courses can actually be on a collision course with the collective processes required by public policies adapted to pluri-ethnic and multicultural societies. Furthermore they do not sufficiently take on board the new outfits for participative democracy and citizen control of public action. Finally the integration of numerous actors within the administration entails reviewing the contents of public affairs training programs. This raises the question of the strategies and training methodology that will have to be implemented in order to adjust to this new political culture.

Claire Launay-Gama, IRG

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### **Private sources of public affairs education and training as a tool for the emergence of legitimate governance in Africa**

In the course of the last fifty years, in the face of the many and manifold crises that beset African states, development policies have exhausted aid workers and specialists in their droves, along with a whole battery of aid programs. These imported operations, blissfully indifferent to local capacities, were followed with very mixed results in Africa. Now home grown intelligence exists. The dynamism of higher education and the input from African researchers in the world's knowledge centres leave no doubt on that count. It is on the basis of this precious capital that Africa must frame its proposals and prepare men and women able to construct new models of public action, to inspire the development of coherent and legitimate regulation systems that work at local and national level, and finally to guide the decision makers responsible for the management of public affairs and to assist the action of all involved in their production.

The necessity for the African continent to make fresh choices calls for the urgent questioning of the training of the actors in public action in Africa. Indeed education for public affairs in Africa is facing several challenges both in terms of access and relevance. Generally provided by the states exclusively, it is proving unable to meet a growing demand and to fill executive posts with adequately qualified personnel.

This being the case, how could we not think it imperative to set up alternative trainings for a new leadership in Africa according to paradigms in line with the new ways of the world? We feel it is important to work towards the emergence of a new generation of administrators able to think, configure and ease the African state into

this new world. There we have one of the fundamental problems that should focus the critical thinking and action of public and private, national and international actors concerned with the place of Africa in the world.

For the IGAC and its partners, recognition of these legitimate issues came during the meeting organised by the IRG in Yaoundé in November 2010 on the problems of governance in Central Africa. This meeting emphasised the necessity to advocate training in the field of public affairs.

This will be the business of the Panafrican Institute for higher education in Public Affairs (IPHEAP) created by the IGAC, which will open officially in September 2012. This project relies on a strategy of mutualisation and confluence of high level competences and skills developed by a range of actors and organisations operating in Africa and elsewhere in the field of governance and conflicts. To this end, it is supported by a broad network of actors among which CERDHAP, the associations Modus Operandi and Irénée, the ARGA or even the UCAC.<sup>2</sup> It may be the means towards renewing the education and training in public affairs and the launching pad for a new leadership in Africa.

Cirille Roland Nyeck, IGAC (Institut pour la gouvernance en Afrique centrale)

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The re-founding of the state (its public administration, its modalities of action and of evaluation, its interaction with society) must first and foremost concur with an integrated and strategic vision defined in the framework of legitimating processes.<sup>7</sup> However it is not enough to recognise this dimension and to take it into account. To become effective, the reforms have to be implemented by means of effective tools (legal, structural, organisational measures). It is important to have the reforms' political vision embedded in the technical devices intended to nurture them and put them into effect. For instance, a more democratic governance does not go without setting up dialogue instruments to run according to a specific methodology. Politics and technique are inextricably bounded together and need to be thought through accordingly. Herein lies a crucial challenge for public institutions reform – and an urgent target for the actors of change.

Finally, the re-founding of the state calls for the adoption of a fresh outlook on public administration reforms, to conceive of them through the broader prism of governance and thus to eschew reforms essentially devised along an administration's internal logic. Thus it becomes very important to understand better the external constraints

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7. See in particular in this publication, the articles by Séverine Bellina "Diversity in search of a state: legitimate democratic governance in the making" and by Claire Launay-Gama and Pierre-Yves Guihéneuf "The Search for influence, dialogue and social control: what kind of discussion forums for state and non-state actors?"

bearing on the administration's operations, but which are also potential forces for change. Administrative reforms will also be stimulated from without, that is what their reconnection with society is about.