International collaboration for modernizing public administration education (with focus on e-government): the illustrative case of NUPS

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Abstract

There is an ongoing discussion in the public administration literature how the international dimensions of e-government could and should be addressed (Heeks, 2003, Partnership 2011). It is interesting to notice, that while there is a significant effort to define and launch research and innovation projects (e-Danube initiative, cross-border prototyping, e-invoicing etc.) we know much less about educational and training programs in this context.

In this paper I present a case about international collaborative efforts for preparing younger generation of public administration students to be able to participate in international programs also related to e-government.

Keywords: EUSDR, NUPS, projects

Overview

Thanks to the National University of Public Service’s (NUPS) participation at the International Forum of Public Administration and Management (IFPAM), a loose group of about two dozen higher education institutions of public administration and/or public management from all around the globe, the Faculty of Public Administration of NUPS (and its legal predecessors) was invited to take part in several projects concerning the renewal of public sector higher- and continuing education.

The paper shows how these collaborations enhance the success potential of international projects (also including e-government) by preparing students, faculty and public administration through joint education efforts, curriculum development, regular exchange, cultural awareness and e-learning deployment.

The first illustration is the MIPAM (Joint Master in International Public Administration and Management) project which aims to provide a new standard for the education of public administration at an international, university level. 7 universities from Western and Eastern Europe (all of them from EU-member countries), under the coordination of the “HochschulefüröffentlicheVerwaltung und Finanzen”, (University of Applied Sciences), Ludwigsburg, Germany have joined their resources in this “Lifelong Learning Project” (LLP) of the EU in order to work out the frames of an international, joint master course.

11 subjects have been developed (in English language, in 4 main clusters) in the project (lasting from 1st October 2010 until 30th September 2013), NUPS developed 3 of them. A pilot phase is currently on-going, where these subjects are tested in the existing MA programmes of 3 out of the 7 universities, including NUPS. The novelty of this project is, that the entire course has been developed so, that it will be available online later on, using the open source “moodle” system. The existing inter-institutional, bilateral agreements and Erasmus agreements are currently used for lecturer and student exchange, but once the course really comes to life, other ways will also be found to ensure the exchange of people.
The second project is DANTE 4 PA ("Danube Network of Training Experts for Public Administration"), an English language "Leonardo project" under the coordination of the Euro-Institut, a bilateral (German and French) institution dealing mostly with direct German-French cross-border projects, situated in the city of Kehl. The DANTE 4 PA (currently in the phase of licensing by Brussels) is a partnership of nine educational institutions which aims to develop and provide demand-driven vocational training modules (also including e-government and its international aspects), dedicated to the needs of administrative experts on the local and regional level in the Danube Region.

The project seeks to contribute to Priority Area 10 (PA10) "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" of the EU’s Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) by strengthening administrative capacities through a genuinely bottom-up approach in the area of vocational training. It wants to address the lack of administrative capacities in the Danube Region. Its novelty is that it is the 1st network, which brings training actors in the EUSDR in public administration together and ensures exchange between Western and Eastern European universities in the field of vocational training.

Third, the “Teaching Excellence for eGovernance” (TEG), a “Tempus project” of the EU (currently also in the phase of licensing by Brussels) is introduced. This project runs under the coordination of the “Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien” (University of Economics, Vienna), a huge university with extensive practical experiences on the field of international projects.

The project consists of 20 universities, again both from Western and Eastern Europe (but in this project EU and also non-EU members (the latter ones called "Partner Countries") are also involved), and aims at enhancing public sector education by the ability of public sector managers to design and manage administrative processes in a complex legal environment and utilizing ICT-enabled tools. The courses to be developed in this project will again all be e-learning materials, the novelty of this project (also compared to the other two) is, that an ERP-system (enterprise resource planning system), namely the SAP system will be used for storing and managing data, and also for education purposes. (SAP has only concentrated its efforts / the development of its software to the economic sector thus far, but is willing to enter public sector. This project is also a big chance for SAP to optimise its software to run processes also in the public sector.)

Lastly, a brand new initiative is a planned, joint scientific conference to be held 8th – 9th May 2014 in Budapest (in English language) by the name of eeeGov Days (Eastern-European e-Government days). The conference is to be organised by several of the aforementioned stakeholders (HVF Ludwigsburg, WU Vienna, NUPS, and several others) for the promotion of e-government studies and publications from several Eastern-European countries, and also as a celebration for a fruitful cooperation between the organisers.
Benefits of the projects

What are the benefits of NUPS’ involvement in these projects? Probably the greatest benefit on NUPS’ side is that involvement in these projects helps NUPS to build up an international reputation – NUPS was only founded from two, previously independent institutions and a faculty of a large Budapest university on the 1st January 2012; meaning that it is barely one and a half years old. A completely new university needs to build up its international relations and reputation, before it is taken really seriously by the universities in the region, all around Europe and throughout the globe.

As for the professional benefits / possibilities: as it is widely known, the structures and services of public administrations differ by each state. On the other hand, mobility of people and enterprises is one of the main aims and goals of the EU (like it is laid down in the EUSD of 2006 too), as well, as of the neighbouring countries (therefore of the countries in the Danube Region too).

Well-planned and renewed public administration of the future may not literally stop by the boundaries of each state. Public administrations of the countries in the Danube region have to learn cooperation at a much higher level, than it is today. This cannot be managed without using modern ICT applications, as well as international projects on the fields of public administration higher and continuing education – just like the aforementioned projects, in which NUPS is involved now.

Current state

While the first project is already in its final phase, the others are still under licensing and/or are in their organisation phase. Also, a big difference between the first, and the second and third projects is, that the latter ones use the resources to be found in the Priority Area 10 (PA10) of the EU’s Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) – “To step up institutional capacity and cooperation”, which is by the way coordinated by the City of Vienna and Slovenia. Universities from both places are involved in both projects. The conference, on the other hand, is a totally self-organised event, without the involvement of any EU-funding.

MIPAM

The MIPAM (Joint Master in International Public Administration and Management) project – as mentioned above – aims to provide a new standard for the education of public administration at an international, university level. The project lasts from 1st October 2010 until 30th September 2013. NUPS (actually its predecessor) was invited to this project due to its over 20 years of cooperation already at that time, with the project-leading Institute, HVF Ludwigsburg, and also as a founding member of the above mentioned IFPAM group.

The MIPAM project develops a curriculum for a joint master program in European public administration. The consortium members are universities and institutions from 7 EU countries (Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Bulgaria) which have many years of experience in higher educational cooperation. These universities train students in public administration and public management for their national and local bodies. The MIPAM project adds a new dimension to the present public administration education in Europe, a common, European state-of-the-art knowledge.

Consortium members are:

- University of Applied Sciences Ludwigsburg, Germany;
- National University of Public Service Budapest, Hungary;
- University College Ghent, Belgium;
- Technical University of Gabrovo, Bulgaria;
• NHL University of Applied Sciences, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands;
• University of Limerick, Ireland;
• University Carlo Cattaneo, Italy.

The project produces first of all a joint curriculum, educational materials, CD-s, handbooks etc. The main product of the project, the curriculum, aims to set new standards in European public administration studies and will be made available free-of-charge by the EU to other higher education institutions as well, after the project ends.

To meet the needs of the education of the 21st century the project uses several ICTs in the new educational materials, to ensure flexibility, mobility and transparency in the joint master course.

The language of the developed master course is English, the international language, which makes the new course available to all European and non-European students. To reach language diversity, it also planned to provide some parts of the curriculum (especially in the field of soft-skills) also in the language of the country, where the university is situated, accompanied by inter-cultural training and language courses.

After the completion of the curriculum and training materials a pilot phase was initiated by University of Applied Sciences Ludwigsburg, National University of Public Service Budapest and University College Ghent – and has just been finished by the end of the education period of the 2nd semester of the academic year 2012/2013. The pilot phase was based on the existing student exchanges between these three universities. In addition other partners test selected modules individually by integration in existing programs or summer schools.

As also mentioned above, NUPS has developed 3 modules (including the structure of the modules and the module handbooks too) out of the 11 modules, namely:
• Intercultural communication;
• E-government;
• Ethics and Transparency (including 2 subjects).

All these subjects ran in English language, with the participation of 15-20 people per subject, also including some exchange students from the already existing network of NUPS.

The most important topic from the point of view of the present paper is the topic of e-government. This subject got the title: “Contexts and questions of public administration informatics”; and was developed by the cooperation of 3 Hungarian researchers of the field.
DANTE 4 PA

Danube Network of Training Experts for Public Administration (DANTE 4 PA) is a cooperation of several higher education institutions and other types of organisation, under the coordination of the Euro-Institut, situated in Kehl, by the German-French border. Just like the TEG project (described below) it is based on the EUSDR (mentioned above), namely on priority area 10 (PA10) of that strategy, also mentioned above.

DANTE 4 PA is a partnership of nine educational institutions which aim to develop and provide demand driven vocational training modules, dedicated to the needs of administrative experts on the local and regional level in the Danube Region. The core team consists of nine institutions coming from six EU-Member States (RO, HU, SI, SK, DE, UK), teamed-up by a number of strategic silent partners that support their work on various levels. Key promoter of the project is the federal state of Baden-Württemberg (Germany) which has enabled the match make of the partners during a first phase of the initiative since May 2012.

Drawing on long-lasting and solid bilateral relationships the partners aim to combine three interlinked conceptual approaches.

1. Thematic Approach: Identification and enhanced development of existing thematic strengths and training offers of each partner designing and implementing transferable vocational training modules;
2. Conceptual Approach: assessment of the specific regional needs through continuous stakeholder engagement and consultation; informing enhanced development of existing strengths;
3. Inter-Regional Approach: practical exchange within existing relationships, deepening cooperation through mutual learning and collective development of a coherent training offer; framed by a clear follow-up vision of a territorial roll-out in 2014/15.

Administrative capacity is one of the most important challenges for developing the Danube macro-region. Both territorial cohesion and economic, environmental and social development very much depend on public administrations, delivering services at high quality and in accordance with European legal and professional standards. In addition, also the implementation of the EUSDR, as defined by the European Commission and currently concretized by the Danube countries via numerous projects within the eleven defined priority-areas, presupposes administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

In this regard the lack of administrative capacities can be seen the crucial “bottle-neck” with the vital potential to hinder development in all areas and stages of the Region and its potential.

In this regard the local and regional level has a prominent role to play. Due to various reasons, the administrative capacity at the local and regional level still has to be optimized in many countries of the Danube space.

Against this background the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg took the initiative and encouraged the Universities of Applied Sciences Ludwigsburg and Kehl, both very well experienced Schools of Administrative Sciences, together with the Euro-Institut as coordinating partner to develop a sustainable administrative capacity-building approach, drawing on existing relations with other partner institutions in order to strengthen the local/regional level of the Danube region.

The project:

- First elaborated the needs in each partner country;
- Then there was a “meso-level” questionnaire – consultation of partners i.e. professionals in the field of public administration and education;
- Thirdly a set of subjects was chosen, which the partners wanted to address – and also pilot trainings were held at the end of 2012 (in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and in Budapest, Hungary);
A concept of target groups is being formed, based on experiences gathered during the steps above; and institutional setting and support will be gathered;

Lastly, the consolidated experiences and outcomes of this partnership will flow into a joint follow up of the network, aiming to implement the developed administrative capacity building approach within a larger territorial scale through European funds in 2014/15.

Based on a first internal assessment, combining the existing resources and the external needs, the project has elaborated the following set of pre-identified training subjects, which the project wants to address and exchange on:

1. Strategic Management in public administration;
2. Project Management in public administration;
3. Project Qualification and Planning in the context of EU-Funding;
4. Local and Regional Sustainability Development (holistic planning approach for communities);
5. Peace Building in post conflict areas (e.g. Balkan) and Citizen participation;
6. Ethics in public administration;
7. Basic Training on the EU (Institutions, legislative procedures, etc.);
8. Public Private Partnership (PPP);
9. Leadership/HR Management/ HR Development;
10. Financial Management and controlling (Budgeting/Accounting/Procurement);

NUPS has committed itself to participation in areas 1, 4 and 11 of the areas mentioned above, with areas 4 and 11 including topics regarding e-government issues, and the international aspects / possibilities lying in the international aspect of e-government.

The project aims to have the following impacts:
- widened scope of the partners – mutual understanding – interdisciplinarity;
- more open mindedness, more empathy and sensitiveness;
- common perception of problems and potential solutions for public administration in the Danube Region;
- dissemination and exchange of good practices in public administration leading to improved demand driven training offers;
- multilateral networking abilities;
- equal opportunities;
- new projects and possibilities of cooperation arising;
- improved ability of engaged partners to address the issues in public administration;
- new ways of European working culture experienced and shared.

Silent partners and local networks of each partner institution will be important resources that validate, evaluate, test and promote the findings.
“Teaching Excellence for eGovernance” (TEG) is a large and loose cooperation of 20 higher education institutions and other types of organisations; EU and non-EU alike, under the coordination of “Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien” (WU Wien). Just like the DANTE4 PA project (described above) it is also based on the EUSDR (mentioned above), namely on priority area 10 (PA10) of that strategy, also mentioned above.

Public sector education has largely been based on theoretical (mainly legal and financial) knowledge in isolated areas, e.g., budgeting or social services legislation. In the real world, however, leaders in the administration are often confronted with processes which are the implementation of all applicable legal provisions in a complex framework and the implementation of this framework in ICT-enabled tools. Social services, as an example, equally involve issues of privacy, registers and identification, customer interaction, archiving, budgeting, non-discrimination and many others – and most likely the implementation of all this in an ICT-enabled tool. Furthermore, administrative processes span departmental boundaries and are often processed in cycles.

This is why beyond the foundational legal and financial education, future leaders in government services must also learn to design and run processes within a complex legal framework and in an ICT enabled environment.

In the private sector, this process- and ICT-orientation has become standard in the past two decades (first and mostly through the software developed by SAP Corp.). Private companies are now organized along their core value processes which typically cover several departments in the organization and which heavily rely on ICT. The public sector, however, is not just a simple copy of private sector process and organizational management: Firstly, a different – and typically more stringent – legal framework applies; also, public administration has completely different goals which include welfare, fairness, public safety, non-discrimination and the assuring of equal rights and opportunities, also security and political participation. Hence, the issues of organizational complexity and process management may apply much the same way as in the private sector, but the public sector has a distinctly different environment and set of goals which warrants a specialized and goal-oriented education.

The project aims at enhancing public sector education by this ability to design and manage administrative processes in a complex legal environment and mostly through utilizing ICT-enabled tools. All regions involved in the project have “Law and good governance” among their regional priorities for curricular reform. The project content hence meets the regional priorities and by educating future leaders in the public administration, will have a long-term effect on the way public administration thinks and works in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century environment. All participating institutions are leaders in educating future public sector administrators and professional leaders; they know the field and the requirements in their respective country and they clearly identify the necessity for the new vision of public sector education as outlined above.

The requirements in this field were explored in great detail by a study commissioned by the Federal State of Baden Württemberg as part of its Danube Strategy where the University of Applied Sciences Ludwigsburg (lead partner), the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications of Moldova, the Regional Cooperation Council, Zagreb University, the Centre for eGovernance Development Ljubljana and WU Vienna participated.

Good governance requires well-trained civil servants – that’s an obvious fact. The curricular reform contained in this project is to modernize the training of future leaders in public sector administration. The teaching focus is on enhancing auditability/accountability and public sector efficiency, both by using state-of-the-art management methodology and ICT-enabled tools. Content will be based on the EU “acquis” which is relevant for all Partner Countries in an accession process and can also be seen as Good Practice even beyond.
The focus is on the professional education of future civil servants on administrative processes including their legal base using ICT-enabled tools. The project will create courses to be taught at the partner universities. The eLearning content and the case studies will be jointly developed as part of the project. The ICT-enabled case studies will be implemented in a state-of-the-art ERP system (SAP product; for subjects 1-6 – see later), and other ICT-tools (like the “moodle” system), enabling students not just to hear or read how administrative processes work, but to get a vivid experience on how these processes work and how different areas of the administration are interlinked. This will give students a unique understanding of applying their theoretical knowledge and prepare them for the reality of their future administrative capacities.

The legal background will mainly be based on the EU “AcquisCommunautaire” which will help to familiarize future leaders in public administration in the Partner Countries with the framework of the EU and due to the standardization and mutual compatibility of the content created also to foster regional cooperation, which will then foster staff/student mobility. Apart from a specific subject dedicated to it, all subjects will encompass auditing and compliance mechanisms.

The main focus of the project is on sustainability of the content created. The teaching content, even though developed at the universities from EU countries, will be defined in close co-ordination with the institutions from the Partner Countries with the emphasis to embed them in the local course programmes. As for the content, there will be a complete knowledge transfer to the universities in the Partner Countries and the hosting centre for the ERP system will be located in a Partner Country as well.

The aim of the project is to design and create subjects for a public sector-oriented education with the following subjects:

1. Budgeting including accruals and cost accounting in the public sector;
2. Procurement following the relevant EU directives;
3. Grantor Management;
4. Social Service and Case Management;
5. Utilities and PPP and their representation in public sector accounting;
6. Auditing and Fraud Detection as a contribution to good governance;
7. HR in the Public Sector;
8. Project Management and technology assessment in the Public Sector;
9. Citizen Engagement with focus on the Aarhus Convention.

The subjects will be suitable for both Bachelor and Master level. All subjects will incorporate state-of-the-art ICT tools (like the aforementioned SAP products and the “moodle” system) that serve as demonstrators and real-world experience of the processes taught. Students will receive the legal and procedural training and will then be confronted with realistic case studies to be processed, which will also be integrated in homework and assessment.

NUPS has committed itself to the areas 8 and 9 from the mentioned ones; both including the dissemination of ICT tools (ERP-systems and e-government solutions).
**eeeGov Days**

Eastern European e-Government Days is a brand new initiation of several of the partners mentioned above (like HVF Ludwigsburg, WU Wien and NUPS) to make a scientific conference on the up-to-date questions of e-government, and to put them into an international and cross-border perspective.

It is also a great chance to celebrate the 25 years anniversary of the cooperation of HVF and NUPS (and their predecessors), as well as to serve as a start for a fruitful cooperation of all the partners involved in the projects mentioned above, in the future. Besides the international partners, several Hungarian institutions / governmental and private organisations are planned to be invited (like the vice-state-secretary responsible for e-government of the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, or the Research Centre for Information Society and –Trends; a UNESCO supported research group based at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics).

This occasion (besides giving international and Hungarian guests a chance to hold presentations and to introduce themselves to (hopefully) new partners) shows how important it is for NUPS to be present also at an international, as well as a scientific level.

**Summary**

All of the projects / initiations show, how important it is for NUPS to form an international reputation.

Reputation is not the only thing of course, NUPS seeks to achieve through all the projects / initiations mentioned above, but it also wishes to become one of the main research and education centres in Central- and Eastern Europe for the use of ICT enabled tools in higher and continuing education and public administration, as well as to become a think-tank and research / education centre for e-government and relating studies.
References


