

Editing *Public Administration*

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Public Administration is the longest-standing journal in the field. Founded in the aftermath of the First World War, its creation reflected a concern with the stability of political-administrative regimes at a time of great social turmoil, and an increased, and related, interest in machinery of government questions. Viscount Richard Haldane, the founder of this journal, was one of the most senior British statespeople of his time, responsible for major government reforms. His extensive network across the political and academic spectrum supported the creation of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). His influence on British higher education is still felt to the present day, namely with the 'Haldane Principle' that research funding decisions are to be made by academic peer-review not politicians. The creation of *Public Administration* reflected Haldane's vision of the role of the civil service in supporting state capacity. He envisaged a highly educated civil service, cooperating closely with the academic world, thereby bringing about improved efficiency in public administration (Campbell 2020: 325-6). Haldane's strong interest in machinery of government questions was also informed by his interest in German philosophy (especially Hegel). The founding journal editorial noted an emphasis on the scientific study of public administration whose 'single aim [was] the efficiency of public services, and the efficiency of public servants'. The journal was to provide a place for 'clear thinking' (see Haldane 1923) by publishing articles that made, as noted by the first ever editorial, an 'actual contributions to knowledge and discussion'.

Fast forward to the world of the 2010s. It is a world of post-financial depression, political turmoil including democratic backsliding and Brexit, and considerable concern as to the problem-solving capacity of the state (see Lodge and Wegrich 2014). *Public Administration* has long evolved towards becoming a major international academic journal, especially under the editorial stewardship of Rod Rhodes (Rhodes 2021). In 2011, the objective of the new editorial team that had been put together by Arjen Boin (including Martin Lodge, Salvador Parrado, Kai Wegrich, Chris Ansell and Lan Xue), was to continue on this path of internationalisation. This process continued during the period 2017-2020 when the editorial team included Lodge, Sharon Gilad, Salvador Parrado, Samuel Workman and Lan Xue. As noted by Aoiki et al (2021), the ambition throughout the 2010s was to allow for a 'big tent' approach towards the study of public administration, offering a home to papers of international significance, regardless of theoretical, conceptual and methodological tradition or geographical location (Boin et al 2011).

Public Administration has also been seen as a traditionally 'British' journal, reflecting its origins in the 1920s. The reputation for being *British* (or, to put it less politely, insular) lay behind the inclusion of 'international' in the subtitle and the existence of a dedicated 'European forum' section (edited by Walter Kickert). The team taking over in 2011 removed such different sections within the journal. On the one hand, the journal was truly international in its scope and no longer required any specific signposting. On the other hand, the nature of articles made such a distinction

appear ever more arbitrary. The team also re-introduced the annual Haldane Prize for the 'best paper' (as selected by a committee drawn from the editorial board). This contrasted with the past, where the award had been made to the 'best practitioner paper'. Another sign of internationalisation was the establishment of formal ties to the American Political Science Association's Public Administration section. *Public Administration* continued as a major outlet of British public administration as part of its commitment to publishing international leading work.

Being an editor of *Public Administration* located at the LSE prompts many reflections regarding linkages between the founding fathers of *Public Administration* (that were also close to the origins of the LSE), key LSE-based authors in this journal (such as Laski, Wallas, Robson, Herman Finer, and, more recently, Dunleavy, Hood and Page) and the present day. In reflection, then, what, if any, is the value of a *British* Public Administration? And, is there any value in a British-influenced *Public Administration* in view of the internationalised nature of the academic profession.

The value of a *British* Public Administration

One of the central claims regarding the tradition of *British* public administration is said to be its emphasis on institutional and historical perspectives at the expense of 'American theorising' (see Robson 1961). For others, this represented a (pro-welfare state) 'Fabian socialist earnestness' (to use a term by Geoffrey Fry (1999: 530)) that not just contrasted with academic traditions emphasising theoretical models, but also with more political conservative traditions, such as the German Verwaltungslehre. *Public Administration* reflected this tradition of emphasising institutional and empirical approaches, but, as noted by Rhodes (2011a, 2011b), since the 1960s, *Public Administration* did become increasingly interested in publishing papers emphasising their theoretical relevance, marking a move away from a journal mostly or partly dedicated to publishing reflective practitioner contributions. At the same time, *Public Administration* maintained, as part of its 'big tent' approach, a strong interest in examining substantive issues in public administration.

More generally, though, there are some key aspects of a *British* public administration that have been reflected in the pages of this journal throughout its first hundred years. As noted by Rosamund Thomas (1990) this tradition involved (i) the assumed fusion of politics and administration (rather than seeing them as distinct enterprises), (ii) the acceptance that public administration was not a scientific enterprise alone, but had ethical implications and (iii) the view that bureaucracy was potentially a 'problem', especially with regards to (productive) efficiency.

It is particularly the acceptance of a 'fusion' between politics and administration that has characterised *Public Administration* throughout the decades, as can be noted in a range of seminal articles in this journal, such as Samuel Finer's contribution on individual ministerial responsibility (Finer 1956), or debates regarding the 'core executive' as put forward by Patrick Dunleavy and Rod Rhodes (see also Elgie 2011, Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990). The view of the fusion between the worlds of politics and administration has also had wider implications for the academic field in the

UK, namely that public administration has been more closely aligned to political science than in other countries. This has meant that public administration has traditionally been conceived in a broad sense, and such broad understanding has also had its impact on the publication profile of *Public Administration*. A similar central theme throughout the decades of *Public Administration* has been an interest in applying business ideas to the field of public administration.

The traditional value of a *British* public administration has not been about the study of events and developments in various corners of the United Kingdom. Of course, the British influence on wider international scholarship has benefited from that fact that the UK's administrative system and associated reform debates and initiatives have, traditionally, been of significance for colonial and post-colonial Westminster systems. Further international 'attractions' of the British system included the constitutional convention of a 'neutral civil service' and a reputation for reform leadership, especially since the 1980s. This international impact was, in the past, also accentuated by the UK higher education experience that many academics in the English-speaking world received.

While these traditional ties have been declining, the nature of *British* public administration has also been changing (Hood 2011). Indeed, since the 1990s, it is difficult to speak of a *British* public administration. The internationalisation of the British academic job market make it more appropriate to speak of public administration research in Britain. This internationalisation naturally encouraged an interest in comparative approaches, as well as an increased interest in dynamics such as Europeanisation and transnational governance. *Public Administration* reflected and contributed to these changes, as noted by Rhodes (2021) and Aoiki et al (2021). The value of a *British* public administration therefore might be seen, in the early decades of the 21st century, by its international and comparative outlook (see also Page 1995, Pollitt 2011).

To what extent these dynamics will continue as *Public Administration* moves beyond its 100th birthday can be questioned: Brexit has not just reduced the attractions of the British academic job market. Brexit might be seen as an exciting experiment for some, but a context of depleted resources for public authorities and universities alike, territorial disintegration and growing politicisation (see Koop and Lodge 2021) are unlikely to allow for research of 'reform leadership' experiences that might attract international interest.

The value of a British *Public Administration*?

For a journal claiming to be an 'international quarterly', an internationalisation and diversification of authors, editorial boards and readership is inherently valuable. As academic biographies and networks internationalise, there might be little to be said for a journal with a reputation of being 'British'. And, indeed, one might say that *Public Administration* has moved beyond its former 'national' home to reflect the changing nature of public administration as a field. If journals such as the *American Political Science Review* can be edited by a team of non-US based academics for a certain editorial period in office, then, surely, there is hardly a case to be made for a British-

influenced *Public Administration*, especially as the journal, since 1992, does not have any national professional associational backing? Any view that a journal should have a 'national' heritage might therefore be condemned as being somewhat romantic in an age of global publishing houses, if not criticised for displaying pro-Brexit sympathies.

A case for a 'national' recognition might be made in terms of status anxiety and assurance. Paper submissions in the past highlighted the flagship character of *Public Administration* for British public administration scholarship. Having a 'flagship' journal, even without the backing of any association, might provide for some assurance of one's own national field's international standing. It might also offer assurance of a 'sympathetic ear' when submitting papers. At the same time, given the international public administration research network, such concerns might be less significant. What is arguably more important for any journal is an awareness of its historical roots. A scholarship that has little recognition of its past is not just even more prone from rerunning the same old debates, it is also at the risk of entirely decontextualising its own research. A field of study that is unaware of past intellectual and practical concerns is indeed unlikely to offer insight into contemporary challenges. If therefore there is something to be said for a British *Public Administration*, then this is not about the location of editorial offices, but rather about the kind of values that continue to be recognised in editorial decision-making and, ultimately, by the journal's owners, the publisher.

Where next?

Being associated with a journal for a decade in an editorial capacity might be seen (and feel) as a long time. In view of the life and times of *Public Administration*, editorial service is a quickly forgotten footnote. So what implications can one draw from a decade in the editorial engine room of *Public Administration*?

On a biographical note, my initial involvement with academic journals was as book reviews editor of *West European Politics (WEP)*, the well-established comparative European political science journal. Those (early 2000s) were the days when manuscript handling platforms were just emerging, and small publishers were still influential voices. An initial visit to the then publisher of *WEP* included a conversation with a dedicated journal copyeditor who had prepared specific editorial questions - in pencil. By 2011, and the move to *Public Administration*, the world of journal publishing had completely changed, with only few reviewers refusing to engage with the online platform 'manuscript central'. The role of editors and the nature of the production process, especially in terms of copy-editing, have fundamentally changed. Universities are even less likely to view professional service, such as editing a journal, as valuable. These changes to the journal universe have also had consequences for *Public Administration*.

It is undoubtably true that *Public Administration*, as most other journals, is part of an international conversation. While many, as noted above, have noted the British origins of the journal, the focus of the journal and its relevance were always international, whether it was in terms of featuring

articles regarding country experiences, or by offering accounts of major administrative discussions that were frequently picked up in other jurisdictions. *Public Administration* therefore always had an international audience, even though its own profile may have been less so in the past.

Being relevant to an international audience is, of course, important and inherently valuable. A reputation for being an intellectually plural and open journal is part of the inheritance of *Public Administration*. So far, so noteworthy. However, how far internationalisation and openness to disciplinary diversity can be taken is somewhat more questionable. Any citation analysis will quickly reveal the limits of real internationalisation and diversification. Editorial statements or board memberships are unlikely to address dynamics that are driven by academic career incentives and university performance management systems.

In this age of internationalisation, it can also be questioned whether journals can maintain a distinct identity. An identity of a 'big tent' requires strong (editorial) foundations in understanding national administrative systems in comparative perspective. It also requires a capacity to look beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries. It requires an editorial commitment to openness to fully engage with the tensions between interesting, but potentially 'niche' concerns, and the constant demands to please the two year impact factor. One of the greatest ironies of editing *Public Administration* was to witness the perverse incentives of journal rankings at first hand, whilst publishing papers on the perversity of performance indicators.

A further concern relates to the production of academic research. One central concern is that public administration as a field needs to be open to work from comparative politics, sociology and other social science disciplines instead of becoming obsessed with ever smaller niche issues of sole interest to a narrow field in public administration (see also Rhodes 2021). Much of the research continues to be driven by 'research nationalism' packaged in not always reflective ways in the language of international theoretical significance. There are also concerns about the production of research. This concern not only relates to questions as to the ethics of various research methods (such as pay rates in experimental research), but also the conditions under which academic journals are being produced (see Roberts 2019). The open access agenda is unlikely to address any of these dynamics. In the mid-2010s, some argued that traditional publishers and journals were likely to go the way of the music industry. It will be interesting to see what sort of publishing universe *Public Administration* will belong to on its 125th anniversary.

In the end, however, the success of any journal is something that cannot be measured in citations, downloads and social media tracking. One central aspect is the quality of the scholarly conversation during the refereeing process, involving both engaged reviewers and responsive authors. It is about combining an eye for detail and a broader view regarding an international readership. A further key aspect is to ensure that *Public Administration* continues to be seen as a central reference point for leading and emerging research agendas. *Public Administration* is well placed to continue this conversation and maintain its international relevance.

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