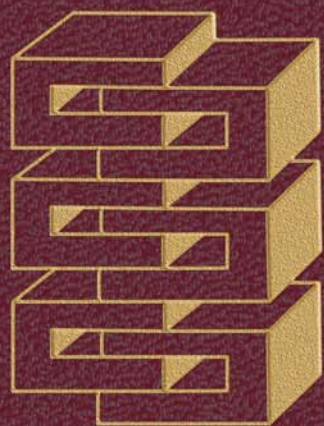


STABLE STATES



RETHINKING SOCIAL COHESION
AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

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In the late 1980s and early 1990s Europe was hit by a unique wave of political upheavals. The Eastern bloc fell apart and new states were founded, often succeeding former dictatorships. More than two decades later, many of these countries are politically and economically sound and some of them have even become members of the European Union. It is particularly in the context of such extreme changes that legislators and administrators wonder about the prerequisites of retaining or regaining a state's stability. Developing countries often concentrate on maintaining law, order and public peace and on re-establishing basic services such as medical care or the collection of taxes. However, making the executive branch and state institutions work, and keeping them readily available, is always a challenge, not only when outdated structures suddenly collapse or post-conflict societies need to recover. So what is the role of public administration in securing governmental stability?

The essentials of “good government” and a “good administration” have occupied generations of public servants. The city hall of Siena, Italy, features an allegory of “Good and Bad Government” on several 14th century frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. John Wyclif used the term “governance” in a document of 1386 and understood it as a “manner of governing” in order to compare different approaches of government. When societies were reshaped in the Age of Enlightenment and the theory of a “social contract” was borne, among others, the role of the state guaranteeing public services changed accordingly. In the 20th century, the idea of the state as a “human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”, as Max Weber put it, was the prevailing concept for many years. It inevitably coined the picture and understanding of public administration. The state, represented by its administrative institutions, exercised its powers in the best way possible – limited by appropriate laws and under the inspecting eyes of parliament and courts. Citizens wishing to get directly involved in administrative and governmental processes were something quite unusual.

Hence, administrative reforms between the 1970s and 1990s mostly concentrated on managerial aspects: How could the state, and the public administration as its “servant”, deliver its goods and products as cost-efficiently and successfully as possible?

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How could the state's performance be measured? Which goals should the public administration reach and which tasks could be taken over by other providers rather than the state's administration? The time of "New Public Management" focused on the belief that the private sector and the public sector could be managed similarly in many ways. With competitive thinking entering governments, the question of "more state or less state" coined administrators for several decades. Public administration was supposed to focus on its "core activities" in order to remain effective, efficient and stable – deregulation, privatization, agencification, and the creation of public-private-partnerships were some of the consequences.

But the ideas of "good government" and "governance" that had first surfaced in the 14th century were not forgotten. The end of the 1980s and early 1990s made public administrators rethink their tool kits as it brought about a shift from mere management and political steering to the active involvement of civil society in the performance of public services. While the term "government" was traditionally narrower and referred to public policy aspects and the delivery of public services (more or less) directly by the state, the term "governance" intended to cover a broader scope and included all kinds of societal stakeholders. It was the intent to restore to the public what was "considered rightfully theirs, to reduce the unaccountable powers of elites and increase the power of the citizenry, to remind public officials, both political and administrative, both within and without government, that the public are the masters not the other way round, and to give the citizenry the feeling that they are in control and that they are the most important stakeholders in governance", as Gerald Caiden and Naomi Caiden, held it.

Thus, "governance" as a specific, citizen-oriented art of governing has unfolded in different categories – be it public governance, corporate governance, or public corporate governance. There is no surprise that public administration is primarily concerned about "public governance". The term "good governance" implies that public services should be delivered in the best way possible – even though the set of tools is not clearly defined. The possible ingredients of good governance are known to be multifaceted. Numerous researchers, think tanks, and scientific societies have elaborated on indispensable elements. Depending on the approach and perspective – be it from a legal, a political, or an economic standpoint – good governance is used to explain different phenomena and reforms. Despite the term's great flexibility, however, a number of elements seem to be commonly shared. When drawing upon reports from major international organizations such as the OECD or the United Nations, good governance should safeguard transparency, honesty, and stakeholder

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engagement. Key issues encompass, inter alia, an efficient and effective public sector, the rule of law, full respect of human rights, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, legitimacy, equity, effective participation of stakeholders, political pluralism and partnerships, political empowerment of people, access to knowledge, information and education, and sustainability. It becomes obvious that good governance is only realistic with sound and stable public institutions. It is intertwined with political and administrative processes that are to guarantee responsibility, accountability, participation, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

In the second half of the 1990s, the internet opened new doors for everyone and public administration had to face new challenges when the traditional thinking of hierarchies and jurisdictions started to melt away. All of a sudden, information, checklists, addresses, phone numbers, and even forms could be found with a few mouse clicks – and without the need to see an official. Electronic government was the new “kid on the block”. Saving time and costs appeared tempting and modern. Some countries, including the USA, even spoke about “reinventing government”. Many states jumped on the “e-train” and developed new programs with a focus on the World Wide Web and its – seemingly – endless opportunities. Once again the public service was confronted with a growing demand from the citizens and had to adapt. Not responding to an e-mail message for more than 24 hours was different from not getting back to a hand-written letter that might have taken the postal service a week to deliver in the first place. More speed, more flexibility, and more accessibility was one side of the coin – cyber security, technical flaws, and the need to re-allocate human resources in order to meet the growing impatience of customers was the other. Since the start of the new millennium, information and communication technology issues have never again left the public administration arena.

The economic and financial crisis of 2008 changed our world and, once again, the relationship between governments and their citizens. In the wake of collapsing markets, imploding business and bursting bubbles, the calls for a stronger state became suddenly louder. Media and researchers observed a “rediscovery of the state” and some kind of “return of government”. Ironically, the wish for stronger governments soon came along with growing distrust for those elected to govern. Current evidence collected by the OECD shows that “the average level of trust in government in 2012 was below its pre-crisis level in 2007”. New financial regulations, budget cuts, and general sacrifices have been a strain to social cohesion for the past years and left public administration with the difficult task to keep serving increasingly dissatisfied citizens at the highest level possible while overall savings started to affect their performance as well.