

Traditions in Public Administration and Development

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the major streams in public administration and development.

In the coming years, the discussions will be around the role of public administration in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Development Agenda (UN, 2015), particularly in the context of developing countries. We identified three main streams in public administration and development: development administration (mostly from public administration scholars), developmental states (political scientists and economists), and international development (development studies). The policy brief points out future challenges for research and practice in the field.

In the coming years, the discussions about how to build an effective state to lead social and economic development with environmental protection will be around the role of public administration and policies in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Development Agenda (UN, 2015), particularly in the context of developing countries. There are three main streams in the broad field of public administration and development. Each of those traditions predominance in certain disciplines or spheres of practice and some of them have regional roots. The first stream focuses on the field of public administration, commonly called “development administration” (Siffin, 2019). It has its roots in the studies of comparative public administration particularly with the involvement of developing countries. The work has been mainly developed by scholars of public administration in the USA. The second stream draws inspiration from development economists and political scientists around the idea of the “developmental state” (Haggard, 2018). The major focus is on state arrangements and different public policies promoting economic growth with particular reference to the studies of the development process in East Asia (Johnson, 1982) as well as in Latin America (Prebisch, 1950). Finally, a tradition has evolved stemming from international development with roots in Europe and focused on building public administrations as a discipline through international cooperation.

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This involves a diverse range of actors from international organizations to donors (multilateral or bilateral) as well as state organizations and other agents in the private sector and civil society (Brinkerhoff, 2008).

The development administration tradition was developed by a group of scholars in the US interested in comparative public administration and developing countries led by Fred Riggs (Riggs, 1965). They argued that the field of public administration had been dominated by the organizational and managerial paradigms from the West without taking into consideration the contextual variations. Thus, those theories needed to be adapted to the context of developing countries. The discussions regarding how bureaucracies should act, derived mostly from ideas developed in the West which formed the major source of knowledge in public administration theories and practices. Some comparative studies emphasize the legal and political roots of public administrations but these approaches generally assume a universal knowledge about how bureaucracies should work, including also from such traditions as classical, neoclassical and neo-managerial perspectives (Farazmand, 2002; Roberts, 2018). However, it is problematic that developing countries will emulate the best practices or use the theories that were developed for an organizational and political context that is very different from theirs. Several concepts were developed to try to understand public administration better in less developed countries, such as the Prismatic Theory of Public Administration developed by Riggs (1964). These scholars developed a whole set of theoretical and empirical analysis on how to build capacity in developing countries or in development administration (Farazmand, 2019).

Another stream of work about the links between public administration and development is the discussions about developmental states, which have been led by economists and political scientists (Caldentey, 2008; Evans, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Haggard, 2018; Johnson, 1982; Skockpol, 1995; Wylde, 2016). Their focus is on the role of the state to generate and promote economic growth. The concept of developmental state is founded in the importance of the role of government and public administration in shaping economic and social relations, which is beyond just trying to fix market imperfections or creating and regulating market institutions. Development state is based on the idea that development processes should be initiated by the State rather than leaving them to the market and private actors. In this initiative, public administration must play an active role to make this happen.

The developmental states depend on the creation of effective political and public administration systems that are essential to transform society and improve the quality of life of citizens. However, the development of effective public administrations has had different outcomes in different countries and regions. While in Asia, the state model of export-oriented supported the development of the economy by actively interfering in the market explains the rapid development of some countries in the region, such as Japan and South Korea (Amsden, 1989; Johnson, 1982), in Latin America the result of the import-substitution policies was different in most cases. The state interference in the economy in Latin America led to slow growth, high public debt, low productivity and widespread corruption, especially in state run companies.

Thus, the concept of the developmental state traditionally refers to the model of state-led development initiatives adopted by East Asian countries following the World War II, based on export-oriented policies. In this model of development, the state intervenes actively and guides economic development by selectively choosing investments in the certain productive sectors with the objective of increasing productivity and exports. This is different from traditional neoclassical economics (“orthodox” or “liberal” economics) where the development process is solely led by markets, and the states role is to help fixing market imperfections or guarantee private property rights or the rule of law. The development state has a goal to interfere in the markets to promote economic development. However, the development state differs from a Marxist approach or ideology, as it does not argue for full control of productive assets. This discussion is, however, beyond the scope of this policy brief. In development state, both the private sector and the market still play an important role in the organization of the economy and it maintains a careful balance between an interventionist state and a liberal state, in which the state provides direction and guidance and works collaboratively with privately owned firms. For the development state to be effective, the private sector must respond to state intervention. Public administration plays a key role in steering the economy towards economic growth and social progress.

While the concept is often associated with the East Asian governments’ efforts to promote industrialization following the World War II, Latin American governments adopted a similar approach of state intervention in the economy during the same period, which, however, was based on import-substitution and lasted until the end of twentieth century.

In the context of Latin America, the first reference to the “developmental state” was made by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto in the 1970s (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979; Schneider, 1999), even though the idea of developmental state is intrinsic to much earlier economic ideas led by Latin American economists like Raul Prebisch (1950). Another difference between the developmental state in Asia and Latin America was the large investment of the former in education and other social policies as well as the emphasis on building a merit-based bureaucracy.

The third stream of public administration and development scholarship has been developed in the fields of international development or development management (Brinkerhoff, 2008), as well as in international relations. Its roots lie on the efforts of capacity building in the bureaucracies of earlier European colonies and ex-colonies and the emergence of international cooperation after the World War II, as well as state building efforts in post-conflict countries (Brinkerhoff, 2005). The discussions in this stream are around how to analyze the impacts of international development assistance and how to build capacity in public administration in developing countries through international cooperation. It led to a number of studies in developed countries, particularly related to the politics and management of aid, such as aid agencies or ministries (Gulrajani, 2015). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental economic organization, is one of the centers for ideas and research about international development, as it monitors international aid among its members (mostly developed countries), or the DAC (Development Assistance Committee) countries. A large part of the literature in this stream is focused on the impacts of development projects and programs led by international donors, which could be UN organizations, development banks, bilateral development agencies (e.g., USAid and Japan International Cooperation Agency - JICA) or Non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Public administration is deemed fundamental to make aid effective. Some of the programs are related to capacity building in public administration in developing countries, including reforms, such as decentralization or privatization/outourcing of public services. The studies overlap with some of the previous streams of work as many ideas about the functioning of public administration and how to change it were brought to developing countries through international cooperation.

In the 1990s, the United Nations embraced the idea of having public administration as an area for the engagement with the international community (Braibant, 1996). Practitioners now populate the fields and many of them work in international organizations, think-tanks and NGOs. Europeans are prominent in this stream because of its roots in the studies about building public administrations in the former colonies and the more important role of international development in Europe as compared to other regions, even though there are scholars and practitioners from in all continents.

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