The disciplinary (re)orientation of Public Administration education in Europe: A survey

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1 Introduction: Disciplinary orientation and multi- and interdisciplinarity in PA education

How future public administrators are educated is a question relevant from a number of viewpoints. From a practical, or policy, perspective PA education is a key determinant of the operation of public administrations and, in particular, of the feasibility of reformatory (or, for that matter, maintenance oriented) intentions of the government of the day. This question also has a more theoretical relevance though. What "Public Administration" is conceived of in the academia of different countries tells us a lot about the general conception – in a sense: the culture – of public administration as a field of societal practice. Throughout the 2000's a comparative research of PA education focused on a number of different dimensions, such as the didactical approaches used (Newswander and Newswander 2012, Reichard 2002), issues of quality assurance and accreditation (Geva-May and Maslove 2007, Reichard 2010) and – last but not least – the disciplinary composition, orientation and identity of the field (Bauer 2005, Bouckaert 2008, Geva-May et al. 2006, Geva-May and Maslove 2007, Hajnal 2003, Kickert and Stillman 1999, Kickert 2007a, Nemec et al. 2012, Reichard and Röber 2009).

The research reported here focuses on this latter aspect; it attempts to shed light on the current trends characterizing European countries in terms of their dominant mode of locating PA education in the multi-dimensional space of related and relevant disciplines, and the forces driving the changes taking place in the field.

On the western side of the Atlantic there seems to be an extent of consensus that the most important factor driving change – beside the internal dynamics of the related academic fields – is, on a global level, the proliferation of phenomena often referred to as governance. That is, such factors as the increasing presence of horizontal, as opposed to vertical, links between the government and other societal actors, the increased reliance on for-profit and non-profit agents (most frequently as service providers), the increasingly globalized nature of the field, and the increasing elements of participation (Denhardt 2001, Ellwood 2008, Kettl 2001, Newswander and Newswander 2012, Olewu 2002). The established "genres" of PA programs in the broad sense – classical Public Administration, Public Policy/Policy Analysis, and Public Management programs – continue to exist, while their curricula continue to converge (though to a limited extent only; see Ellwood 2008).

On the European side of the Atlantic in addition to factors related to governance managerial reforms and the like authors note some additional important contextual factors of change too.

Probably the single most important one of these is the dynamics between two closely interrelated factors: the historically rooted national distinctiveness of PA education (Kickert 2007b), oftentimes reinforced by institutional and cultural inertia (Reichard and Röber 209, Hajnal and Jenei 2007, 2008) on the one hand, and the increasing Europeanisation, including the Bologna reforms, and the resulting "opening up" globalization of formerly "entrenched" national fields, on the other (Bouckaert 2007, Geva-May and Maslove 2007, Verheijen and Connaughton 2003). Authors focusing on one or a few countries/regions occasionally highlight additional, more idiosyncratic factors too. For example, Reichard and Röber (2009) note German citizens' preference for publicly provided, as opposed to privatized/contracted out, services, which – clearly – counteracts the global trends and pressures towards third-party service provision. Moreover, the formal (legally defined) norms as well as the (informal) values-in-use guiding recruitment into the civil service play down interdisciplinary PA graduates in favor of the traditionally entrenched, predominantly legal training. A similar factor was identified by Nemec et al. (2012) in the context of the three Central and Eastern European countries – the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia – they examine. A third example of such "regional-scope explanations" may be Bauer's (2005) one. Bauer hypothesizes, among others, that the disciplinary orientation of Central and Eastern European countries PA education may be explained with the extent, to which these countries' PA education system was open vs. closed in the Socialist era (ibid. p. 63).

The current study focuses on the above issues – that is, on the changes having taken place in terms of PA programs' disciplinary identity in Europe throughout the 2000's, and the driving forces underlying those changes – in the light of some additional data. In order to fully understand this ambition it is necessary to briefly describe the antecedents of the research.

1.1   The antecedent of the current research

The EU/Socrates Funded Thematic Network for Public Administration undertook a detailed survey of European university degree programs in the field of Public Administration (Verheijen-Connaughton 1999, Verheijen-Nemec 2000). Subsequently, I undertook a quantitative statistical analysis of PA curricula taught in (almost) all participating countries (Hajnal 2003). The focus of this latter research was mostly on the disciplinary composition of PA programs – that is, on the extent, to which program curricula include subjects in Law, Management, Political Science/Public Policy, and so on. The central questions of the research were twofold:

   a)   whether there are characteristic differences between countries in terms of the disciplinary orientation/composition of their PA curricula and if yes
   b)   can these countries be grouped into characteristic, distinct clusters?

Answering these questions, in the final analysis, was thought to say something about the prevailing administrative culture(s) to be found in Europe. The work induced some extent of academic interest and debate. Ten years after the publication of these results (and almost fifteen years after the data collection) now it seems topical to take a new look at the same questions.

My earlier analysis built on the EPAN/TNPA database containing 155 Public Administration programs from 23 European countries, involving altogether 5,687courses. Each course was coded so that the codes reflected which discipline the given course belongs to. They used a pre-defined, carefully conceptualized and operationalized set of disciplinary categories. Subsequently these data were aggregated on the program level and then on the country level (mean percentages of disciplines). In the next stage a statistical procedure called hierarchical cluster analysis revealed that these countries can be grouped into three distinguishable clusters – the "corporate", the "multidisciplinary" and the "legal" – as follows.

Discipline*	'Corporate'	'Public'	'Legal'	Mean for all countries
	cluster (% of disciplines in PA program curricula)			
Law	12.5	16.1	**<u>33.9</u>**	20.5
Management	**<u>19.5</u>**	5.2	10.1	13.8
Political Science	11.3	**<u>29.0</u>**	9.9	13.9

* Only the three most significant disciplinary categories are displayed. For more details see Hajnal (2003)

Table 1.: The three clusters of countries based on the disciplinary composition of their PA programs in Europe (significant values highlighted)

The three clusters that have been identified based on the disciplinary content of their programs coincide with the three basic, traditional approaches found in Europe.

(a) The 'legal' cluster: Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Yugoslavia.. The legalistic administrative culture views public administration as a well-running machine executing detailed legal regulations.

(b) The 'public' cluster: Belgium, France, Spain, Sweden. The specialty of this approach seems to be its emphasis on the uniquely political, public character of its subject, strongly relying on concepts and approaches of Political Sciences and Policy Sciences/Public Policy. This historically new paradigm gradually appeared in certain Mediterranean countries as well, where to some extent it succeeded in replacing the traditionally strong legal Public Administration culture.

(c) The 'corporate' cluster: Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Slovakia, Ukraine. These countries approach the problem of running the public sector by relying on the concepts of Business Management. This approach seems to be identical with the one often denoted as "Anglo-Saxon" or NPM, and it is most influential in Ireland and the Nordic countries. It is quite remarkable that – in addition to the Baltic states, which are strongly influenced by Scandinavian Public Management concepts and practices – a large number of former communist countries are members of this group too. However note that most of these countries are so-called "newly independent" ones.

1.2   The research questions

The previous research concluded, on the basis of limited and partly speculative evidence, that a shift had been occurring in the two halves of Europe, away from the common, law-centered past but towards a different future, whereby

- Continental European and Mediterranean countries lean towards a 'public' approach, whereas
- former Communist countries – or, at least, the newly independent ones – lean towards a managerial approach to PA (Hajnal 2003 p. 253).

Moreover, several hypotheses and questions guiding future research were formulated as follows.

RQ(1): Will the already established (i.e., not newly independent) countries of Central and Eastern Europe (such as Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia) remain impenetrable to Western European, 'publicly' oriented influence, and will thus they remain strongholds of the 'legalist' tradition?

RQ(2): Is the trend among Mediterranean countries leading from 'legalism' to a 'public' tradition going to continue?

RQ(3): What is going to happen to the 'core' Germanic cultures – are they going to adapt or remain intact (Hajnal 2003 p 253)?

In addition to these questions several new questions have been formulated as follows.

RQ(4): What are the driving forces of change; if any, related to the affected countries' PA tradition?

RQ(5): Given the Bologna reforms having occurred underway what effects, if any, can be attributed to their introduction?

The research reported here attempts to shed light on these questions.

2 Method and data

The large scale, very resource-intensive survey underlying the empirical results presented above was impossible to replicate at this time. Therefore a survey of key informants was conducted. The experts targeted by the survey were those invited for the Sixth Trans-European Dialogue in Public Administration (TED6) held in Potsdam, Germany between 7 and 9 February 2013[1]. The theme of the by-invitation expert meeting was "Education and training: Preparing for the future of the public sector in Europe"[2]. The authoritativeness of the participants was ensured by the restrictive selection/invitation criteria applied by the organizers emphasizing proven academic credentials and experience in the field of PA education and training. The survey instrument was administered electronically, as a web-based questionnaire survey (see Attachment 1). Among some additional ones the survey included questions on the following substantive issues:

-   Reflect on the finding of the original [2003] study regarding the cluster membership of your country ("legal" versus "managerial" versus "public" cluster)!
-   Has there been any significant change 1999 regarding the position of your country in the three-cluster typology?
-   How did the Bologna reform affect PA education in your country?
-   In the past decade what were the major factors influencing the disciplinary position and orientation of PA education in your country (if any)?

As the above questions show one of the important assumptions underlying the research was that it is justified to treat "country" the primary unit of analysis. As some of the respondents pointed out the extent, to which PA programs' heterogeneity allows one to treat "country" as the unit of analysis (i.e., to talk about "the representative program" or "the dominant mode of instruction" etc. in a given country) may of course be questioned.

There are however two important arguments supporting the above assumption in the context of the present research. Firstly, the assumption that despite all their possible internal heterogeneity and changeability different countries do exhibit a significant extent of stability in terms of their "national distinctiveness" (Kickert 2007a) of how PA is perceived and taught is broadly shared and very rarely, if at all, seriously questioned in scholarly research on European PA science and education (Bauer 2005, Hajnal 2003, Kickert and Stillman 1999, Kickert 2007a, Nemec et al. 2012, Verheijen and Connaughton 1999, 2003, Verheijen and Nemec 2000).

Secondly, the question of whether aggregation of data at the country level is justified or not was explicitly exposed and to some extent tackled in the 2003 study too (p. 256). The univariate and multivariate analyses of variance (ANOVA, MANOVA) showed that the 'country' variable is statistically significant in explaining variance of PA programs, and therefore it seemed defendable to aggregate program data at the country level – that is, to talk about "German", "Dutch" etc. programs.

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[1] See http://ted-dialogues.org/2013/01/31/announcing-ted6-in-potsdam/

[2] The organizers of the TEDs are, traditionally, the two major academic networks of the Public Administration field in Western and Eastern Europe, EGPA (European Group of Public Administration) and NISPACee (Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe), respectively. The 2013 event was hosted by the Potsdam Center for Policy and Management, University of Potsdam and the German Federal Academy of Public Administration (BAKÖV).

Therefore the primary unit of analysis was, throughout the survey and the analyses, the "country". In a limited number of cases where one country was represented by two respondents who happened to disagree on one or the other question the analysis reflects on individual respondents though.

The countries and number of invitees involved are displayed in the following table.

Country	N. of invites	N. of responses
FR	1	0
UA	1	1
SP	1	0
BG	1	0
SK	1	1
RO	1	1
PL	1	0
CH	1	0
CZ	1	1
EST	1	0
DK	2	0
BE	2	1
IT	2	1
UK	2	0
HU	2	2
SLO	3	1
NL	4	2
DE	10	2
Total N 18	**37**	**13**

Table 2.: The survey population

As the data show in most cases one expert per country was invited (the above figures include such "non-respondents" as presidents of the co-organizer research networks, interested experts of related but different fields etc.). Three countries however were represented in the response set by two respondents each; in these cases the country as primary unit of analysis was maintained however agreements vs. disagreements between the two respondents were separately analyzed and reflected upon in the course of the analysis.

A comment on (possible criticisms regarding) the number of responses seems to be in order at this point. Firstly, the "response rate" may seem to be very modest. In this regard it is important to realize that neither the "Total N" nor the "N of responses" can be treated in the usual way. The mere fact that

instead of, say, thirty only thirteen countries appear in the response set does not affect the validity or the reliability of the findings established – only the geographical scope of the survey is affected. On the other hand the fact that instead of two or three only one expert per country responded does not pose, in and by itself, any particular difficulty either since respondents are assumed to have sufficient information and judgmental ability anyway.

The resulting data was analyzed using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti) and simple visualisations and crosstabulations of the resulting data.

3   Findings

3.1   Agreement with the original (2003) findings

The main research question tackled by the survey regards the trajectory – i.e., the direction and size of movement – of countries in the 'disciplinary space' defined in the 2003 study. Since this was done on the basis of respondents' expert judgment it seemed to be justified to check the extent, to which they locate their country's starting position in agreement with the 2003 study's finding.
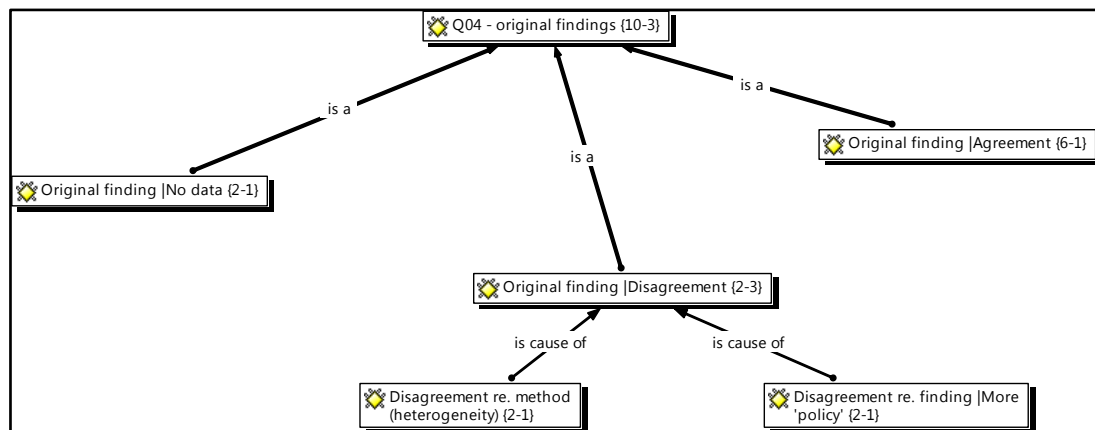

Figure 1. Codes and code occurrences related to the respondents' agreement with the findings of Hajnal (2003)[3]

Country	Agreement
BE	YES
CZ	NO
DE	N.A.
HU	YES
IT	YES
NL	NO
RO	YES
SK	YES

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[3] In all figures the first number enclosed in parentheses after the code name refers to the given code's number of occurrences. The second number (not relied on in the present analysis) shows the number of links to other codes.

SLO	N.A.
UKR	YES
TOTAL	**6:2**

Table 3.: Agreement with the findings of the Hajnal (2003) study (code frequencies)

Two countries in the present data set – Germany and Slovenia – were not included in the 2003 survey. The Dutch and the Czech respondents signaled their disagreement with the way their country was clustered in the 2003 survey, while in the case of the remaining six countries respondents agreed. The disagreements were partly related not to the substantive finding (the country's position among the three clusters). Rather, two out of the three respondents disagreeing perceived problems with the extent, to which (their) country as such can serve as a unit of analysis, given the large within-country heterogeneity of PA programs (however see also the sub-section on method on this issue).

3.2 Disciplinary reorientation – patterns of change

The central research question regards the trajectory of change (if any) characterizing individual countries during the 2000's.
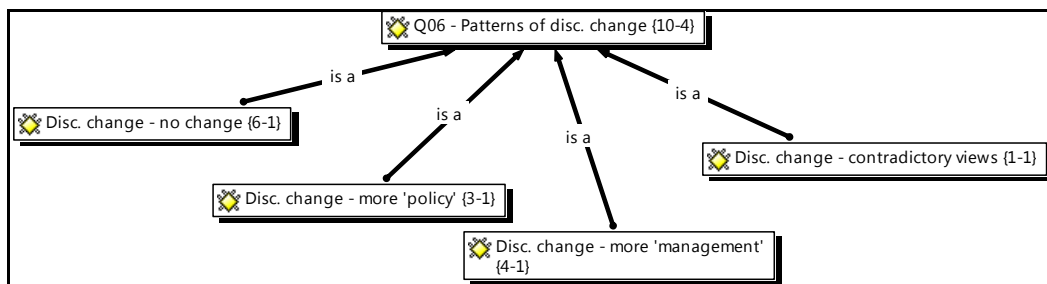

Figure 2.: Codes related to the 'Patterns of disciplinary change'

As the above figure shows three substantive trajectories appear in the responses: countries are either

1) are increasingly managerial, or
2) are increasingly policy oriented (using the terminology of the earlier survey: increasingly 'public'), or
3) they do not change (note that the first and the second patterns are not mutually exclusive but can co-occur).

In the case of one country (the Netherlands) the respondents disagreed. The responses are shown in the following table.

	Country	No change	More 'management'	More 'policy'	*Original cluster position*
Change	SK	0	0	1	*legal*
	RO	0	1	0	*legal*

	IT	0	0	1	*legal*
	SLO	0	1	1	*[legal†]*
?.	NL	1*	1*	0	*management*
No change	DE	1**	1**	0	*legal*
	BE	1	0	0	*policy/public*
	CZ	1	0	0	*management*
	HU	1	0	0	*legal*
	UKR	1	0	0	*management*
	TOTALS:	**6**	**4**	**3**	

† The Slovenian respondent assumed a 'legal' position for Slovenia in the time of previous survey
* In the case of the two Dutch respondents there was disagreement regarding the trajectory
** One of the German respondents observed a 'very cautious' shift towards managerialism

Table 4.: Patterns of disciplinary change (code frequencies)

The central features of these data can be summarized as follows:

1) The weakening/shrinking of the 'legal' cluster seems to have continued. 'Policy' and 'management' orientation strengthened in some countries; the 'legal' one did not.
2) Though it is remarkable, especially in the view of the relatively long time having passed since the previous data collections, that the majority (five or six) of the observed countries do not seem to have produced any significant change in terms of their disciplinary orientation.
3) The 'melting away' of the legal cluster took place in the case of Italy, Romania and Slovakia. Italy and Slovakia seem to have moved towards the 'policy' cluster while Romania moved towards a 'management' orientation. It is remarkable that only countries originally in the 'legal' cluster underwent any change; non-'legal' countries remained stable.
4) Germany and Hungary, however, seem to have remained strongholds of the legally oriented PA education (though some very subtle change might have occurred, especially in Germany).

3.3 Factors driving change

The next question relates to the factors driving changes in the examined countries' disciplinary orientation.

The factors revealed by the responses can be grouped according to whether they are external to the PA education field or, rather, result from the field's internal dynamics. (By "internal" the management and staff of PA programs and education institutions are meant; by "external" all stakeholders and effects outside that realm.) The motives are displayed in the following figure.
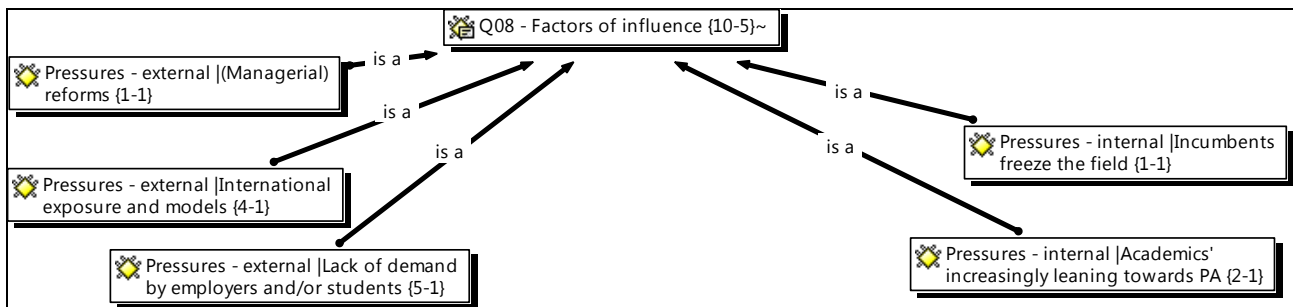
Figure 3.: Codes related to the 'Factors influencing disciplinary change'

The occurrence of the different motives is summarized in the following table.

	Country	Internal factors	External factors
Change	SK	-	*Lack of demand by employers and/or students*
	RO	-	International exposure and models
	IT	-	Managerial reforms
	SLO	-	International exposure and models
?	NL	Academics increasingly lean towards PA	International exposure and models
No changeÁltalában is kicsit	DE	-	*Lack of demand by employers and/or students*
	BE	-	-
	CZ	-	International exposure and models *Lack of demand by employers and/or students*
	HU	*Incumbents freeze the field*; Academics increasingly lean towards PA	*Lack of demand by employers and/or students*
	UKR	-	-

Table 5.: Factors driving/inhibiting disciplinary change (code frequencies)[4]

With regards to the pattern revealed in the above table the following features should be emphasized:

a) Two of the factors – "Incumbents freeze the field" and "Lack of demand by employers and/or students" (typeset in italic) – are actually not driving forces of change but rather forces counteracting change and acting towards maintaining the status quo instead.

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[4] „Academics increasingly lead towards PA" refers to either the case when a new generation of academics conceive the field in a way that is more interdisciplinary and is closer to the „mainstream" (as opposed to 'legalist') conceptualization, or the existing faculty and program management changes attitude/orientation.

b) As it can be seen all actual (i.e. successful) changes were driven by external factors.
c) Focusing on the two 'hard-core legalist' countries – i.e., those where no actual change has occurred: Germany and Hungary – it seems that the "Lack of demand by employers and/or students" inhibiting factor is decisive. (This lack of demand is nevertheless present in other CEE countries: Czech and Slovakia too.) Therefore this factor needs further highlight and specification.

Let's examine more closely what the above-mentioned "Lack of demand by employers and/or students" entails.

- For Hungary: "*The organizations prefer lawyers to PA degree. The legal regulation reveals a similar nature. Students find this natural, as the alternative does not even occur to them. In fact, the overwhelming majority of students who seek further education after completing the School of PA go to Law faculties.*"
- For Germany: "*On demand side (recruitment of junior civil servants): generally poor demand in last years due to cutbacks, now increasing (demography). Still about 2/3 of junior staff at the two higher layers of civil service who were recruited in the last 10 years have a law focus.*" "Most polytechnic universities in Germany now have changed from a Diplom to a BA-degree; the content, however, is still predominantly law (it must be >50% according to a joint civil service access regulation)."
- For Czech: "*[…] 2. Demography [leads to] a decrease in demand. 3. A crisis of the trust: Public Administration is not considered to be a prestigious and sometimes even a decent occupation among the young generation (or at least the most talented part of them)*".
- For Slovakia: "*The interest for PA studies is significantly decreasing. For part time students the reason is obvious: most PA employees without degree already finished their studies. […N]on-existing rules for carrier promotion in PA may be important factor (moreover, there is no formal requirement for public servants to hold PA degree)*".

These quotations suggest that it is the legalist thinking entrenched by, and maintained in, the organizational practices, legal regulations as well as culture in the broader sense that underlie the remarkable stability of 'legalism' in PA education.

3.4   Effects of the Bologna process

The last question analyzed here is related to the effects of the introduction of the Bologna type – i.e., three-phase, internationally compatible – education structure on PA programs. Motives occurring in the responses are displayed in the next figure.
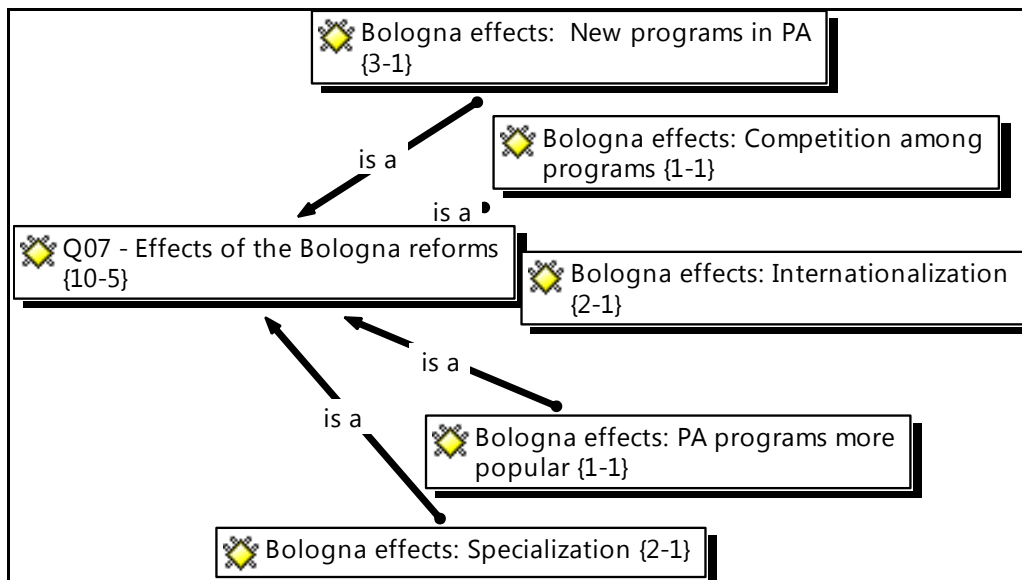
Figure 4. Codes related to the 'Effects of Bologna type reforms'

The frequency of the occurrence of these motives is displayed in the next table.

	Country	New programs in PA	Competition among programs	Internationa-lization	More popular	Specialization	TOTAL:
Substantive effect	NL	0	0	1	0	1	2
	DE	1	0	0	1	0	2
	IT	0	1	0	0	1	2
	SLO	0	0	1	0	0	1
	HU	1	0	0	0	0	1
	UKR	1	0	0	0	0	1
No substantive effect	SK	0	0	0	0	0	0
	RO	0	0	0	0	0	0
	BE	0	0	0	0	0	0
	CZ	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTALS:	3	1	2	1	2	9

Table 6.: Effects of Bologna type reforms (code frequencies)

In the case of the four countries labeled as featuring 'no substantive effect' – three of which are CEE countries – respondents mentioned either no effects, or only formal, structural effects of Bologna type reforms (such as the division of programs into a 3+2 format).

As the above data show no effect on the disciplinary orientation of PA programs – the main dependent variable of the current research – can be observed. Rather, some extent of opening up of the PA education field is present, both internally (new programs appearing) and externally (increasing internationalizations – student and faculty exchange, transfer of models).

4 Discussion and conclusions

The first three research questions exposed in sub-section 1.2 related the hypothesized trajectory of three sub-groups of 'legalist' countries: (i) former Communist Central and Eastern European / CEE – notably: mostly 'old', non-newly-independent – countries; (ii) Mediterranean countries; (iii) 'hard-core Germanic' countries of Austria and Germany.

As regards the first group (RQ1) the answer is definitely yes; out of the four 'legalist' CEE countries in the data set – Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – three made a notable move away from the 'legalist' tradition. The direction of this shift is not uniform however. Romania has leaned towards a more 'public', Slovakia a more 'managerial', while Slovenia towards a more 'public' as well as more 'managerial' approach. (Note that Slovenia was not included in the original, 2003 survey; its original position is assumed on the basis of the respondent's assessment.) Hungary, however, remained largely intact from similar changes.

As regards the second group (RQ2) unfortunately from among the Mediterranean countries only Italy appears in the current data set. Italy, in line with the expectations formulated in Hajnal (2003), continued its shift towards a more 'public', policy oriented approach to PA education.

From among the third group of countries only Germany appears in the response data set. In this case the predominantly 'legalist' character seems to have remained more or less intact.

The fourth research question (RQ4) relates to the factors driving – or, for that matter, inhibiting – change, if any.

Out of the four countries demonstrating any change (originally all having been located in the 'legalist' cluster)

- two countries – Romania and Slovenia – were characterized by normative pressures emanating from (perceived) international models and standards;
- Italian changes however were driven by the domestic factor of real-life managerial public management reforms; while
- Slovakia's case remains somewhat ambiguous and need some further clarification.

It is interesting to take a look at the dynamics of forces pro and con change that, in the case of Hungary being one of the two 'legalist' strongholds and the only one in CEE, have supposedly led to a stalemate in the field of PA education. One – supposedly pro-change – factor is the influx of a new breed of PA academics in the higher education field. On the other hand, this impetus was blocked by the institutional landscape of PA education dominated by well-established, strong incumbents and keeping away new entrants. Although no further details appear in this regard in the data, on the basis of personal insight an additional, second-order factor explaining the strength of incumbents may be hypothesized. Namely, the system of higher education accreditation have, at least until very recently, been characterized by an undisputable dominance of old, established universities (practically, any new entrant could be allowed into the market only by an almost-consensual agreement of their future competitors, the old universities).

Although these patterns do not explicitly appear in the data it should be noted that after the 2010 parliamentary elections the incoming center-Right government initiated sweeping changes in the PA higher education field. The legally oriented PA programs run by the older, large, established universities were, in the course of 2011-2012, practically eliminated by government regulations. Instead, relying on the force of legal regulations, almost the entire 'market' for PA education was concentrated in the newly founded National University of Public Service (in fact, a joint university of civil and uniformed services). The curricula at this university's PA faculty continue to be overwhelmingly legalistic.

In general it seems that in those cases where real changes occurred the impetus came from the outside ("external factors"); note all these countries were (originally) in the 'legal' cluster. On the other hand if we take a look at the two 'legal' countries largely untouched by disciplinary reorientation we see that – notwithstanding any other internal and/or external pressure – in both countries there is a powerful force inhibiting change. This force emanates from such sources as (i) the recruitment practices and preferences of public administration (often reinforced by civil service regulations); and (ii) students' preferences related to – in particular: lack of interest in a more multidisciplinary – PA education (the two factors probably mutually reinforcing one another).

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Attachment 1: The survey instrument

THE ATTACHMENT IS OMITTED FROM THE VERSION UPLOADED TO THE IRSPM CONFERENCE SITE BECAUSE IT EXCEEDS THE SIZE LIMIT ALLOWED BY THE SITE ADMINISTRATOR. THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT IS AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR ON REQUEST.