

Scientific societies in the field of administrative sciences in Central and Eastern Europe

Prof. Dr. Adam Rixer PhD¹

Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Hungary, e-mail: rixer.adam@kre.hu

Abstract:

When we search for the significant players of administrative sciences on both the domestic and international level, we find – amongst others, amongst departments of universities, think-tanks and committees of academies of sciences – also organisations that can be treated as parts of civil society, especially scientific societies, particularly scientific associations. My current paper deals exclusively with the latter ones (with scientific societies) and my main goal is to enlist those functions that can be or even should be provided by those entities.

My paper covers also the results of an international survey conducted among 142 representatives of administrative sciences of 18 countries in our region, especially of those countries which were formerly socialist states. And finally, with the help of the facts collected I aim to show, and offer some fairly new possible functions to invent in the interest of those scientific societies of the region in question.

Keywords: administrative sciences, scientific societies, scientific associations, functions of scientific societies, Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

A good starting point for this work might be, *on the one hand*, to identify, assess and offer as a possible model the main characteristics, historical development, current functions and practices of the better-known American administrative sciences societies, and, *on the other hand*, to present the main characteristics of specifically European international administrative sciences organisations that are typically regional in their activities, with a special reference to the main roles assumed by these entities and the more relevant functions they perform. In this context, an overview of the roles played by civil society-type organisations that are not active in the field of administrative sciences can also be of high importance. Moreover, surveys of the existence and contemporary characteristics of Administrative Sciences associations in the former socialist countries may also serve as an important point of reference. The data from my survey of representatives of administrative sciences in the former socialist countries within Central and Eastern Europe will also contribute to the formulation of well-founded recommendations at the end of my work.

1. Scientific associations in Europe and around the world

The uninterrupted development, the possibility of historical and professional development without caesurae, of some “Western” scientific organisations is enviable from the perspective of the former socialist states. A good example of this continuity in the field of administrative sciences is the American Society for Administrative

¹ Head of Department, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Faculty of Law, Department of Administration and Infocommunication, Budapest, Hungary. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6945-0312>

Sciences (ASPA); its activities, which began in the 1920s, have remained uninterrupted and have been able to play a role in the emergence of Administrative Sciences as a profession in the USA: in addition to its diverse but narrowly focused professional activities (e.g., accreditation activities, promoting the development of independent academic schools, ensuring the separation of professional groups within the organisation), it has also developed awards, scholarships, competitions and ethical standards (Pugh, 1989, 1). The example of the ASPA illustrates the organic development of the relationship with political science, history, economics and other fields, which is at the same time a process of organic detachment. In line with Anglo-Saxon features, a former chair of the organisation, Mary E. Guy (2003, 642–643), has also argued in one of her works that the greatest difficulty within the organisation has long been the coexistence and parallel presence of seemingly distant fields: the study of the more political science-nature government activity, and practical approaches of a legal nature, which are connected to the adjudication and interpretation of specific cases. Although we know what we mean by administrative sciences and what is meant by it in the USA, their centres of gravity are in different places; the important questions that we are asking today are the same ones that were raised there a good seventy years ago, namely to what extent should legal science be highlighted among the sub-specialties of administrative sciences within the framework of the association, and should we accept the expanding concept of the science of administrative law, even if the latter is highlighted? (Rixer, 2020, 55–58) These questions are among those to which the Association's membership and its leaders will have to provide answers, recurrently and periodically.

In the field of evaluating scientific impact and effectiveness, beyond the now classic approaches to evaluation within science (e.g. number of citations), there is a growing emphasis in the international literature on all continents on approaches that emphasise the relationship between science and society, and ultimately promote the importance and measurement of direct impact on society. With some generalisation, this scientific shift seeks to “redress” the previous deficit in the science-society relationship through a meaningful dialogue (Fecher et al., 2021), where the value of individual research is not only confirmed by measures of impact on science, but also by the impact on practice and the wider social context, which also becomes measurable over time (Wolf et al., 2013, 104). This change of perspective also means that the practical forms of interaction, which provide the substantive framework for the presentation, communication and ultimately the practical incorporation of experiences and scientific findings, are becoming more important in the context of the dissemination and exploitation of scientific insights (Fecher et al., 2021, 3). The difference between the impact within scientific circles and the impact on society as a whole and on policy-making is reflected in a previous paper on the success of scientific cooperation established with the EU in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (EaP countries): while successful cooperation in the scientific field was achieved and the results were visible in the respective scientific fields, the impact on policy-making and society as a whole was not evident in most cases (Toshkov et al., 2019, 3).

1.1. Functions of scientific societies

The question of what the functions of a scientific association might be was already raised decades ago. According to the German Schimank (1988, 69), there are at least four functions: firstly, a function of communication within a discipline or sub-discipline; secondly, a professional function, which supports individual career paths and also promotes the collective rights and interests of the representatives of the discipline; thirdly, a transfer function,

through which the results of the representatives of science are communicated to the wider public; and a promotional function, through which the scientific community can influence political and scientific policy decisions.

Delicado and his coworkers have studied the specificity of scientific associations in Portugal, a European country similar to Hungary in size and development level (Delicado et al., 2014, 439). He distinguished five functions that they perform: communication within the community, research promotion, dissemination of results, professional advocacy and an advisory role. He concluded that most of these organisations have strengthened over time in their outward activities beyond their membership, and concluded that their internationalisation also spectacularly reflects their practices (ways of operating) in their relations with domestic political and other actors.

There are also examples in the literature of approaches that attempt to generalise by comparing the creation and development of specific European scientific associations: Boncourt (2017, 10) has obtained results that are useful for us by comparing the creation and developmental stages of eight scientific associations at European level, covering five social science fields (although law or management science were not included). He found that the reasons for the emergence of these organisations were often due to tensions between scientific paradigms, and in more than one case to differences between specific scientific institutions, or to geopolitical tensions. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of the organisations studied were not able to achieve fully the objectives they had set out when they were set up, and that their objectives, research topics and research agendas changed significantly along the way. He also points out that there are no such professional organisations covering the whole of Europe, and that their impact is mainly restricted to a limited geographical area. The latter statement is confirmed by the existence and activities of NISPACee in our region of Central and Eastern Europe. Boncourt refers to these aspects (results) as European characteristics (which of course does not exclude the possibility that they may be observed on other continents...). He also noted that most (Western European) scientific NGOs defined the scientific paradigms of their own field in many cases in opposition to or even with reference to (based on) the relevant approaches of American science (Boncourt, 2017, 15). He also recognised the “pattern” that the smaller the country in which the organisation (he uses the term European association) is established, the greater the likelihood that it can count on government financial support in its own country (Boncourt, 2017, 20).

1.2. Administrative sciences NGOs in the former socialist countries

In the *Introduction*, I pointed out that a good starting point for examining the possible aims of the scientific societies of the Central and Eastern European region could be to look at what is happening in other former socialist countries in the same field: do NGOs exist in the field of the discipline under review and, if so, what are their tasks? To answer this question, I sent out a series of questions in English to 142 researchers in 18 countries in the very beginning of 2022. I contacted practitioners in administrative sciences in the former socialist countries, ensuring a representation of sub-disciplines other than law. For the former socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, I did not distinguish whether and to what extent their perception of socialism at the time differed from that of the Soviet Union (the successor states of Yugoslavia and Albania were therefore included).

In the end, 45 substantive responses were received from 12 countries (these are Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) to the following questions:

1. Are there any scientific societies in your country running within administrative sciences?
2. If so, then are there any subdisciplines of administrative sciences that are overrepresented within the scientific priorities of those associations?
3. To what extent are they independent of the state (financially, etc.)?
4. What are the main functions fulfilled by them (towards their members and/or towards the wider public)?²

Due to the uncertainty of the facts and data revealed (for example, it is difficult to verify whether the organisations cited by the respondents as examples existed or were actually operating at the time of the publication of the paper), I have presented mostly aggregated data; that is, I have not listed the organisations, their names and characteristics of individual countries. This type of presentation is also perfectly suited to drawing generalised conclusions, in order to capture, in a factual way, the main common features and the trends of change affecting a larger number of actors. Without going into all the details, what has emerged from the responses?

1) Including Hungary, 6 out of 12 countries have been able to identify at least one genuine NGO (typically an association or foundation). Where there is no scientific entity organised as a classical NGO, there is a local academy of science or a committee organised by the ministry of education or science to carry out a similar science-organising role, bringing together the scientific community. It is noticeable that the further east we go, the fewer NGOs there are. Several respondents also gave unsolicited explanations, embedded in their answers, as to why they think there are no or few administrative sciences associations in their country: According to Wojciech Federczyk, a Polish researcher, scientific societies before '89 could only exist under state organisation, and the gap left by this monopoly has not been entirely filled by administrative sciences in the region to date.³

2) Researchers from all 12 countries (!) mentioned meetings of administrative sciences departments (typically: administrative law departments), the importance of their formal or informal contacts: there is a tendency to organise contacts and cooperation between administrative sciences departments (mostly in the form of meetings, joint research and joint textbooks). In fact, half of the respondents (!) also reported that these collaborations had started, but over time they stalled or became rare or irregular, and in two cases (Lithuania, Bulgaria) they even ceased altogether in recent years. It is interesting to note that this process has followed a similar pattern in Hungary: there was a boom in the 2000s in organised meetings of administrative law departments, but after 2010 these died out, at least initiatives to involve all departments. It is also worth mentioning here that most of the academic associations that have been set up in the region are institutionally linked to a particular administrative law department.

³ “Due to the policy pursued before 1989, scientific societies other than public ones could not develop their activities. At that time, scientific activity was “monopolised” by the state. As can be seen, this is a gap that has not been filled to date.” Wojciech Federczyk, 2022. 03 10. e-mail sent to the author.

3) Almost without exception, academic associations and civil society organisations are growing in the region as a whole from jurisprudence; the predominant approach and choice of subject matter is legal, even if the growing importance and prevalence of political science approaches is also noticeable.

4) A characteristic feature – also due to the average size of the countries of the Central and Eastern European region – is the low number of people professionally involved in administrative jurisprudence or administrative sciences in the broadest sense in a country.

5) All civil society organisations organise conferences for their members and for the wider professional public, either in person or online; in general, the organisation of events and conferences is the typical form of activity. Joint projects are particularly rare, mentioned by only two respondents (and they referred to previous collaborations). It is worth mentioning that about 2/3 of all the NGOs mentioned publish one or more journals; this proportion reaches 4/5 (!) when we include newsletters and various electronic *working papers*.

6) It is interesting to note that the history of the development of local administrative sciences studies has been covered in monographic work(s) in most places, *but that there is a general lack of works on the current state of the discipline*. In this respect, researchers in the region prefer to focus on the past rather than the present.

7) There are also professional NGOs set up by members of staff in public administration, although their scientific activities are not of primary importance: in these cases, they tend to have a complementary profile, serving advocacy or other professional purposes. About one third of all the organisations surveyed fall into this category.

8) There are also non-generalist professional/scientific NGOs dealing with only one essential element or aspect of Administrative Sciences, either related to a “specialised” field of Administrative Sciences (e.g. environment, consumer protection, especially in the case of the Czechs and Poles) or focusing their research on a cross-cutting, “functional” issue (e.g. the context of digitalisation).

9) Among the tasks carried out or to be carried out by professional associations, the need for cooperation with the media and the need for a specific presence in social media, and more generally the importance of social contacts and the desire to communicate scientific results to a wider social public were also mentioned by several actors.

10) The majority of respondents mentioned NISPACee (The Network of Institutes and Schools of Administrative Sciences in Central and Eastern Europe), an international administrative sciences organisation registered in Slovakia, as a model and/or a key non-profit actor in the region.

2. Conclusions and suggestions

This paper has reviewed the academic associations in the wider region in the field of administrative sciences and their various aspects of operation, with a view to drawing sound conclusions and making recommendations that could be useful for the long-established and for the newly created ones as well.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the sciences is the high degree of parallelism: researchers in the field, while sometimes exploring similar or identical topics, often explore different subject areas, sometimes overlapping and sometimes very divergent ideas. This diversity is certainly a necessary element for successful scientific research, but the persistent fragmentation of scientific communities, with a small number of researchers, and the fact that they are only able to engage in meaningful scientific discourse on a very narrow range of topics, also poses a real danger of isolation, both internal (towards their own members) and external (towards the frontiers, towards representatives of other disciplines, towards the wider international community and towards non-professional audiences). The creation of new scientific associations within the Central and Eastern European region, such as *Central and Eastern European Society for Administrative Sciences* in Hungary (launched in 2021), is a single, but decisive step towards avoiding this internal and external isolation. If we look for the underlying reasons for the creation of the latter, which also aspires to a regional role, then – among other factors – the emergence of international visibility as an independent aspect in various performance expectations and evaluations, and the requirement of multi-, inter- and even transdisciplinarity, which has become inescapable, are also pushing researchers in Hungary towards these forms of cooperation. The exciting question is, of course, whether and how *Central and Eastern European Society for Administrative Sciences* as a new arena will change the current logics, existing networks and “points of preference” of scientific collaboration (Evans et al., 2011, 381). We will be able to answer this question in a few years' time. What is already relevant and worthy of consideration is the question of some of the new functions that could be proposed for it and for other important players/actors of the region in the medium term.

The additional roles and tasks I propose for consideration are as follows:

- 1) To take on the task of modernising science, in so far as the value of individual research is nowadays not only confirmed by the metrics of its direct impact on the discipline, either at individual or at community level, but also by the impact on practice and the wider social environment, which will also become measurable over time. Taking on a function that goes beyond the organisation of internal relations and the internal flow of information would be in line with contemporary trends in scientific development, and could be seen as a new and modern conception of the role. This function is obviously inseparable from the increased use of social media.
- 2) As regards future directions, the question of whether further sub-disciplines of Administrative Sciences outside Administrative Jurisprudence will be involved is a kind of watershed, since the answer to this question also answers whether the given entity will define itself as a comprehensive platform of administrative legal science that consciously builds links between the sub-disciplines.
- 3) Although we know that the culture of debate is less developed in the Central and Eastern European region than further west, and that Hungarian and other administrative sciences cannot escape its effects, it is justified to organise events where the organisers consciously strive to ensure that *all relevant views on the issue are represented, and that there is an opportunity for reflection*. By practicing “active neutrality”, it is essential to avoid the phenomenon that has become rampant in Hungarian social science, whereby “national and illiberal” approaches are heard at one event, while “globalist and liberal” approaches are heard at another – on the same topic – avoiding any kind of meaningful, professional dialogue.

4) The accelerating decline in the number of native speakers of those small countries of the region, the rise of English language and the greater internationalisation of administrative sciences studies, as outlined above, are all factors that make *the protection and conscious development of the certain local legal and administrative terminology of each and every country of the Central and Eastern European region* an important task. This can take many forms, from terminological debates to proposals for the renewal of the terminology (neologism).

References:

- Boncourt, T. (2017). The Struggles for European Science: A Comparative Perspective on the History of European Social Science. *Serendipities*, 2(1), 10–32. doi: <https://doi.org/10.25364/11.2:2017.1.2>
- Delicado, A., Rego, R., Conceição, C. P., Pereira, I., & Junqueira, L. (2014). What Roles for Scientific Associations in Contemporary Science?. *Minerva*, 52(4), 439–465. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-014-9260-3>
- Evans, T. S., Lambiotte, R., Panzarasa, P. (2011). Community structure and patterns of scientific collaboration in Business and Management. *Scientometrics*, 89(1), 381–396. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-011-0439-1>
- Fecher, B., Kuper, F., Sokolovska, N., Fenton, A., Hornbostel, S., & Wagner, G. G. (2021). Understanding the Societal Impact of the Social Sciences and Humanities: Remarks on Roles, Challenges, and Expectations. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, 6(696804). doi: <http://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2021.696804>
- Gagyí, A., Ivancheva, M. (2017). The rise and fall of civil society in East-Central Europe. In Moskalewicz, M., Przybylski, W. (Eds.), *Understanding Central Europe* (pp. 281–289). Routledge. doi: <http://doi.org/10.4324/9781315157733-34>
- Guy, M. E. (2003). Ties That Bind: The Link between Public Administration and Political Science. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(3), 641–655. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.00205>
- Kornfeld, W. & Hewitt, E. (1981). The Scientific Community Metaphor. *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics*, 11(1), 24–33. <https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/5693/AIM-641.pdf>
- Kövér, Á. (2015). Captured by church and state: civil society in democratic Hungary. In Krasztev, P., Van Til, J. (Eds.), *Hungarian Patient* (pp. 81–90). CEU Press.
- Ost, D. (1993). The Politics of Interest in Post-Communist East Europe. *Theory and Society*, 22(4), 453–485. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0304-2421%28199308%2922%3A4%3C453%3ATPOIP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J>
- Pugh, D. L. (1989). Professionalism in Public Administration: Problems, Perspectives, and the Role of ASPA. *Public Administration Review*, 49(1), 1–8. doi: <http://doi.org/10.2307/977223>
- Reincke, C. M., Bredenoord, A. L., & van Mil, M. H. (2020). From Deficit to Dialogue in Science Communication. *EMBO Reports*, 21(9), 1–4. doi: <http://doi.org/10.15252/embr.202051278>
- Rixer, Ádám (2022). Academic associations in the field of administrative sciences in Central and Eastern Europe, or what could be the medium-term objectives of the newly established Central and Eastern European Society for Administrative Sciences? *Institutiones Administrationis – Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 2(1), 171–187.
- Rixer, Á. (2021). La société civile face au populisme en Hongrie. In N. Haupais, N., Pouthier, T., Szwedo, P., Zagorski, W. (Eds.), *Le constitutionnalisme face au populisme en Europe centrale* (pp. 161–190). Institut Francophone pour la Justice et la Démocratie – Institut Louise Joinet.
- Rixer, Á. (2020). *A magyar közigazgatási jogtudomány értékelésének szempontjai*. Dialóg Campus. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12944/15963>

Schimank, U. (1988). Scientific associations in the German research system: Results of an empirical study. *Knowledge in Society*, 1(1), 69–85.

Timmermans, A., Brans, M., & Real-Dato, J. (2022). The Advisory Roles of Political Scientists in Comparative Perspective. In Brans, M. Timmermans, A. (Eds.), *The Advisory Roles of Political Scientists in Europe: Comparing Engagements in Policy Advisory Systems* (pp. 363–396). Palgrave Macmillan.

Toshkov, D. (2019). *Scientific cooperation in the Eastern neighbourhood. EU-STRAT Policy Brief Series, No. 7* Freie Universität Berlin.

Wallace, C., Pichler, F., & Haerpfer, C. (2012). Changing Patterns of Civil Society in Europe and America 1995-2005: Is Eastern Europe Different?. *East European Politics and Societies*, 26(1), 3–19. doi: <http://doi.org/10.1177/0888325411401380>

Wolf, B. (2013). Evaluating Research beyond Scientific Impact: How to Include Criteria for Productive Interactions and Impact on Practice and Society. *GAIA*, 22(2), 104–114. doi: <http://doi.org/10.14512/gaia.22.2.9>