Comparative Public Administration in a Globalizing World:
A New Psychological Challenge next to the Traditional Scholarly Challenges

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1. **Introduction: A New Phase in Governing Society**

Understanding the impact of globalization upon states and societies requires both a global and a comparative perspective. The global perspective is necessary to appreciate the fact that various social and economic phenomena pose problems for governments that cannot be (re)solved via domestic policies. Examples of such global phenomena include climate change and global warming, migration, human (sex) trafficking, the garbage patches in the world’s oceans, cybercrime, terrorism, drug trade, the extinction of species, epidemics, and the effects of an increasingly international economy where multinational corporations are difficult to constrain. A comparative perspective is needed because people still live in a territory where the authority to make decisions for all those living in the jurisdiction rests only with the state and its government. A combined global-comparative perspective upon government could very well be limited to describing similarities and differences between the structures and functioning of political-administrative systems. However, in our day and age merely looking at the ‘stamps, flags, and coins’ of political-administrative systems is not enough, and we need to consider the interaction between these systems and their peoples as well. Populations and their governments have become more intertwined than ever before, and it is the communication and information revolution that has made that intense intertwinement possible. Territory is absorbed by government as jurisdiction; people interact with government as citizens; and people identify with the local and national jurisdiction in which they were born and raised. However, belonging to the imagined community of a territorial state does not guarantee that everyone within that state and society will get along. And, clearly, despite that rapidly enhanced capacity of information exchange, human beings have not quite learned how to be a member of a global society of
people. It is the globalization element combined with the new psychological challenge of
overcoming in-group identification and becoming world citizens that might be an important
element in future comparative-global research in public administration.

2. **Territory, People, and Government**

People live in cooperative or collaborative imagined communities and are very much aware of
what differentiates them from other people in their own country (and even from other regions in
their own country) and from people in countries across the entire globe. This has not always been
so. For thousands of years, the territory of the towns or cities that people inhabit together with
the hinterlands that they use was significantly smaller than that of the territories that were not
“incorporated.” Initially the landmasses of the earth were sparsely dotted with areas of somewhat
dense populations, interspersed with vast common lands, and people only knew others who lived
in similar communities not too far away. As populations grow, and the territories they occupy
increase, the territories of the world are slowly, but surely “mapped” into jurisdictions. The
common lands, that is, those lands not regarded as the “property” or *patrimonium* of a particular
ruler or landlord, shrink to the point that in proprietary-legal terms there are no common lands
left (e.g. the enclosures in Britain, 1604-1914). The process where the landmasses of the earth
become part of a jurisdiction, and are thus effectively absorbed into a political regime
(Antarctica excepted), is concluded in the second millennium of the Common Era (CE). It is,
however, not until after the Second World War that the state can be said to truly and effectively
control the territory in its jurisdiction (Scott 2009).
In the decades surrounding the Atlantic Revolutions (the term is from Palmer 1959, 1964), the traditional political-administrative regimes characterized by monarchy (dictatorship) and/or aristocracy (oligarchy) are shaken to the core and this results in permanent changes in the position and role of governments in some parts of the world. In terms of position, it is from that time on, that democracy emerges as the political regime where government rules in name of a community of people as citizens, at least in terms of political theory. These changes basically concern the institutional superstructure from the foundational to the managerial levels of government, and they initially only affect those who work in government as elected officeholders or as career civil servants. They have no consequences yet for the large majority of the population until, on the one hand, an unprecedented growth of government is spurred by the combined effects of industrialization, urbanization and rapid population growth and, on the other hand, an expansion of the popular franchise (and the emergence of political parties) to finally include the entire adult population. It is then, toward the end of the nineteenth century, when (especially local) governments start providing more and more services that the role of government changes fundamentally. The effects of this increase in tasks and services, is visible in the growth of government whether measured in terms of personnel size, vertical and horizontal organizational differentiation, laws and regulation (and especially the growth of secondary laws), and revenue and expenditure.

Governments have clearly changed in terms of their position and role in society in the past 200+ years. Have people changed as well? Today, people probably experience the world they live in as both big and small. Physically, it is considered a big world when travelling it on foot, or when flying from one continent to another. For millennia, however, the fastest speed of travel was on horseback, and that determines the speed with which information can be
exchanged. Speed of travel increases by leaps and bounds in the past 150 years: train, car, motorcycle, and airplane have made it possible for people to travel faster and farther. But, the greatest expansion is in the speed of information exchange. In the past 20, perhaps 30, years, the world has become smaller and smaller, to the point that the “width of the social present” (Fraser 1987, 327) has been reduced to mere seconds. We can now know what happens at the other side of the globe in minutes, seconds even, and we literally have the world, at least much knowledge in the world, at our fingertips. We rarely need to go to the library; instead we simply ‘google’ for information.

Whether people live in the highly fragmented world of the past or in the hyper-connected world of today, they always compare their own living situation to that of others. In that sense, people have not changed. They compare day-to-day things, such as clothes, cars, houses, children, neighborhoods, and schools. Some among them may also compare, for instance, the elements of the institutional superstructures in which they live. The earliest comparisons of (elements of) political-administrative systems date back to the fourth century before the Common Era (BCE), and those often focus on juridical/legal institutional arrangements. However, for most of history, that which people compare is perceived as far away, both culturally as well as geographically. The comparison pursued springs from curiosity.

It is probably no surprise to find that as the position and role of government changes, so does the interest in comparison both in terms of approach as well is in terms of substantive focus (Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot 2015, 427-474). With regard to focus, four main categories can be distinguished. The earliest systematic comparisons in the modern era, i.e. around the 1800s, are those of political and legal systems and conducted both out of curiosity as well as pursued for descriptive-utilitarian reasons. From the middle of the nineteenth century on, and added to the
descriptive and utilitarian foci, some scholars seek to strengthen the scientific and methodological quality of comparative research (e.g., John Stuart Mill’s most similar and most different system designs) while others adopt a more evolutionary focus (e.g., Duganne 1860; Wilson 1889). The hope is that improved analytical, methodological and evolutionary approaches then lead to the discovery of universal social laws and a grand theory of stages in the development of civilization. For a long time, scholars hold to this belief and those laboring in the vineyards of public administration in the first part of the twentieth century aim to buttress its scientific claims (cf. scientific management, application of statistics). It becomes, though, increasingly clear that the methodological challenges to establishing and confirming these grand, evolutionary theories are too great for the time being, so attention shifts after the Second World War to the more modest middle-range theories focused on a specific topical area (e.g., human resource management, budgeting and finance, policy making, decision making, organization theory, etc.). Deep down, however, the faint hope remains that at some point in the future, these middle-range theories will add up to a grand theory. Indeed, it is hard to escape the Ionian chant, as E.O. Wilson called it (1998, 4), of unity of knowledge. Added to these various approaches in the past 30 years or so is neo-institutional theory which aims at understanding emergence and development of institutions in their interaction with the environment (for a nice overview see Peters 2012).

These approaches concern how we conduct comparisons, but equally important is what we are comparing. There are four types of comparison. Cross-national comparison start at the time of the Atlantic Revolutions and remain the single and dominant type of comparison until the 1960s. With the rapid growth of government services culminating into the emergence of the welfare state in the 1950s-1970s, cross-policy comparisons become fashionable from the 1960s
on and are pursued for utilitarian reasons. This growth of public (welfare) services tightens central-local (the European concept) or intergovernmental (the American concept) relations, and so it is that from the 1980s on *cross-level comparisons* are made as well. Finally, with the advent of neo-institutionalism, *cross-time comparisons* become again appealing.

Whether pursued out of (a) curiosity, or (b) in search of usable knowledge, or (c) in hopes of theoretical/conceptual development, or (d) for increasing civility and understanding between peoples, comparative research meets various obstacles and challenges, and most authors identify these as being of a theoretical, conceptual, and methodological nature. Comparison is, first and foremost, a method of research (Björkman 2017, 60). It is not a substantive topic in the study of public administration. Comparative research generally focuses on a specific substantive (policy) area and then explores that by contrasting (groups of) countries, levels of government, or successive periods over time. But, comparative studies do not often take the larger political-administrative and societal context into account within which these policies unfold. So, before addressing these theoretical, conceptual, and methodological challenges, we need to gauge the nature of our time with regard to trends in and around the state.

### 3. **Globalization and the State**

Globalization and internationalization of government and governance are increasingly central concepts in the practitioner and academic worlds. Surprisingly, there is as far as I know no specific research into the influence of globalization upon the three branches of government, nor is there much, if any, evidence-based research into the impact of globalization upon state institutions, models and best practices (Farazmand 1999; for some exploratory literature on the
exchange of models and best practices see several chapters in Van der Meer et al. 2015; for impact of globalization on the civil service career, forthcoming, Raadschelders and Verheijen). More specifically, most authors provide generalized arguments and thoughts about the impact of globalization, and thus implicitly suggest that its impact is the same everywhere.

2.1 Generalized Thoughts about the Impact of Globalization

These generalized opinions and perspectives on the impact of globalization on the state can be lumped into two main groups. Some argue that globalization diminishes state autonomy and capacity, as the ability of states to independently define and manage policy is constrained. Others argue that while globalization changes dynamics and interaction, it does not change the fact that the state is the only actor that can make international agreements on behalf of its population. In this second line of thought, globalization may actually strengthen and enrich national governments, providing new opportunities rather than weakening the policy making capabilities.

Globalization Diminishes State Capacity

In the first line of argument, the erosion of national government autonomy and capacity is a consequence of the three main factors. First, there is the influence that perceptions of globalization’s consequences have on the scope and role of the state. With privatization and contracting-out in the United States, for instance, the domestic role and position of its state may have hollowed out (cf. Jessop 1993, 10; Milward & Provan 2000), and perhaps especially because they have not been matched with increased oversight (Freeman & Minow 2009). While the American state may have been hollowed out in terms of service delivery, its scope has not changed. Some collective services are simply offered by private actors, but still funded by
taxpayers’ money. Furthermore, from a juridical point of view, the state is not hollowed-out because it is still the only actor that can make authoritative decisions on behalf of all people. In Western and non-Western countries with a strong state tradition, the role and position of the state has not been hollowed out (Bohne et al. 2014a, 3-4; 2014b, 261). Can we really say, by way of example, that the massive privatizations in China since the 1980s (Burns 2015, 81) or in the United Kingdom have resulted in a hollowing out of the state? Of course not. Chinese government created a private sector but retained strong control over the economy. With regard to the role and position of the state in the international arena, it operates in a network of international forum and advocacy organizations that focus on various economic, cultural, political, military, and social issues and interests that have global proportions. The most important, and often the only, members of these international organizations are states.

The second factor concerns the rise of shared sovereignty (most explicit in the case of the European Union, but also in other parts of the world) and the transfer of some competencies to the supranational level. Third is the growing importance of issues (from the global economic crisis to climate change) that transcend the ability and power of territorial states, which for most states can only be addressed effectively at a supra- and/or intergovernmental level. In this reasoning, globalization diminishes the autonomy and centrality of national governments.

Globalization Enhances State Capacity

Others argue that the state continues to be at the center of the international political system (again: as the only actor that has the authority to make binding decisions on behalf of the entire population in a sovereign country) and that interaction in the international arena enhances state capacity through exposure to different solutions for common policy issues. In this reasoning,
national governments have an expanded role that requires new capacity and ability. Governments
now have to frame national contributions to help resolve policy challenges that transcend the
nation state. In and of itself, domestic policies aimed at mitigating effects of global trends and
issues will increasingly prove insufficient.

2.2 Country-Specific Impact of Globalization
Most of the observations made in Section 2.1 are very general, that is, they are not country
specific. But, is the impact of globalization the same for every country? Intuitively, we expect
that the influence of globalization will vary with structure and functioning of the political-
administrative system. It will also depend on the extent to which market parties (i.e., businesses,
corporations, entrepreneurial activity) have the freedom to do as they see fit. By way of
illustration, consider the United States. Contracting-out and privatization are mentioned above as
trends in the United States. These trends are much less important or play out differently in many
other countries. The United States is often characterized as a weak state, even though its
government has grown as significantly as that of many other Western states. Another example of
an expanding role of the state, in the aftermath of the 2008 worldwide economic recession states
not only bailed out banks but also heightened their attention for regulating the economy. If
anything, the state is perceived as the major guardian of the economy and is assumed to take
responsibility for the stability of the financial system (Bohne et al. 2014b, 260). One could even
argue that, at least in the United States, the private sector has been quite successful in privatizing
profit and socializing risk.

In light of the comments above, it is thus a myth to label the USA as a weak state (Novak
2008) when assessing it in terms of functions exercised and services delivered by the public
sector directly or financed by public agencies. It is presently rather weak in the sense that it lacks effective political collaboration between members of different parties. This is illustrated by the inability to introduce high-speed rail. Why is it that Chinese, Japanese, and several Western-European governments can build high-speed rail facilities, while in the United States the transportation infrastructure is almost literally crumbling? The answer is: partisanship. The Ohio Hub was a project aimed at linking Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Cleveland and some cities in Ontario, Canada. It was proposed by Democratic governor Ted Strickland and would have received $400 million in federal support. This federal support was withdrawn when the newly elected governor John Kasich made good on his campaign promise to cancel the project in 2010. What makes sense economically does not always appear to reign supreme in American politics.

To assess the impact of globalization upon states, it is important to untangle truly global phenomena, such as those mentioned at the beginning of this paper, from national trends as these unfold in a globalizing context and in an already existing political-administrative tradition. For example, domestic reforms in the Chinese economy have been substantial since the early 1980s (Burns 2015, 80-82). Local governments receive larger management responsibilities over the economy and state-owned enterprises have been privatized. The outcomes of civil service reforms are less clear (apart from serious personnel size reductions). The economic reforms have prompted judicial reforms (e.g., emphasizing the rule of law, the 1989 Administrative Litigation Law), where the judiciary increasingly serves as mediator between citizens and government (Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot 2015, 254-259). And, in the slipstream of reforms toward a socialist market economy, Chinese higher education has opened up to the people at large, and increasing numbers of Chinese students spend time studying abroad (ibid, 372-376). To understand the extent to which domestic developments are prompted by globalizing trends, we
do need comparative research, but the challenges of generating knowledge that is satisfying
academics and practitioners alike are substantial.

4. Two Main Theoretical Challenges of Comparative Research

Robert Dahl expected the study of public administration to become a science when it used the
comparative method. In his words:

No science of public administration is possible unless: [...] there is a body of
comparative studies from which it may be possible to discover principles and generalities
that transcend national boundaries and peculiar historical experiences. (1947, 11)

Dahl challenged scholars of public administration to find universal laws for social phenomena,
just as colleagues in the natural sciences had been dazzlingly successful in identifying universal
laws for physical phenomena. Before continuing with a line of argument that is prompted by
Dahl but will move away from him, consider the following. A Japanese and a Dutch
astrophysicist meet at a conference. Neither speaks English, but they can communicate with each
other through a universal language in physics, namely the peculiar mathematical formulae of
relativity theory and quantum mechanics. Something similar cannot happen between social
scientists when do not speak each other’s language. They are faced with three interrelated types
of challenges characteristic of and for any social science research project. In this section, I will
focus on the theoretical challenges; conceptual challenges and methodological and practical
challenges will be discussed in Sections Four and Five.
3.1 The First Theoretical Challenge: Finding a Study-Overarching Theory

The first theoretical challenge in the study of public administration and, in fact, in the social sciences at large, is that social scientists lack a discipline- or study-overarching theory, let alone universal laws. Instead, they have many theories and some law-like generalizations. Scholars of public administration freely use any theory that helps them analyze and understand a particular problem. Theories used in budgeting and finance are different from those employed in studies concerning human resource management, organizational culture, or public sector ethics. By contrast, some of the natural sciences proceed within the boundaries of a paradigm, which can be defined as a specific set of concepts and theories that describe, explain and predict an interrelated set of physical phenomena. The physicists work with the Standard Model and find new particles (e.g., the Higgs particle). Chemists use Mendeleyev’s Periodic Table of Elements and find new elements. Biologists find evolutionary theory to be the best in the analysis of how life on earth unfolded (note: not how it emerged). While the paradigm concept is much used by social scientists, they must admit that they do not have one. In fact, a paradigm is impossible in the social sciences since social scientists not only study social phenomena but are actually part of the phenomena they study and may even shape them (cf. Giddens’ double hermeneutic). And, let’s not forget that social scientists cannot avoid bringing their own biases into their research.

Science narrowly defined describes, explains and predicts according to generally accepted methods of inquiry; science broadly defined (i.e., Wissenschaft) describes and pursues understanding of meaning without following specific methods of inquiry (Raadschelders 2011a, 40-41). Of these three elements, description is common to all scholarly endeavors. Explanation is more a feature of the natural sciences, since it works with universal laws that are not bound by
time and context. Prediction is also a feature of the natural sciences, since the existing paradigms have predicted discoveries. The social sciences have, at best, law-like generalizations and can certainly offer understanding. In public administration, two such generalizations are that all governments across the globe have structured themselves through layering territories defined as jurisdictions (national, regional, local levels of government) and through hierarchical organizational and functionally differentiated structures (also known as bureaucracy) (Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot 2015, chapters 2-6). However, how these governmental structures function varies from country to country, may vary from policy area to policy area (e.g., an army functions more hierarchically than a department of human services), and thus varies even within countries (ibid., chapters 9-12). Furthermore, while natural science explanations are mono-causal, social science explanations are multi-causal. Lamenting the limitations of explanation in the social sciences, Weber pondered “how can causal explanation of an individual fact be possible … the number and nature of causes that contributed to an individual event is always infinite.” (1985, 177; author translation) Where Weber is focused on a specific event, we can imagine that the challenges of explanation are compounded in comparative research, and this was noted by Fritz Scharpf when he observed that “For comparative policy research, this means that the potential number of different constellations of situational and institutional factors will be extremely large – so large, in fact, that it is rather unlikely that exactly the same factor combination will appear in many empirical cases.” (1997, 23; also quoted in Ostrom 2005, 10) And, as Ostrom reiterated: “…the many relevant variables, the immense number of combinations of these variables that exist, and their organization into multiple levels of analysis make understanding organizational social life a complex endeavor.” (2005, 11) As for prediction, social scientists can only make rather mundane predictions, such as
that when an open hand is extended in greeting, most people will respond by giving a handshake. More meaningful predictions about the future course of societies at large cannot be expected any time soon, if ever.

3.2 The Second Theoretical Challenge: Fragmentation of Knowledge

The second main challenge is a function of the geographical, substantive, epistemological and methodological fragmentation of knowledge. Each of these four types of fragmentation presents a serious impediment on the road toward the development of law-like generalizations and theory. With regard to geographical fragmentation, most comparative studies target a specific group of countries and that simply will not and cannot result in law-like generalizations relevant to the globe. If anything, “families of nations,” as Adolino and Blake call them (2011, 31), are nothing but stereotypes of nations. Geographic proximity is what defines Germanic countries, but the structure and functioning of German and Dutch government is very different (and the Dutch and German people believe themselves to be very different from one another, just as the Chinese consider themselves as very different from the Japanese and the Koreans). Occupation by France is what ‘unites’ Napoleonic countries, but Italy and the Netherlands are really very different. There are Islamic countries, but anyone recognizes the vast difference between fairly secular Indonesia and fundamentalist Iran. And then, can all those other countries in South-East Asia be meaningfully lumped together? Yet another example, all those countries that share a “Westminster” past have developed along quite different paths since independence (Patapan et al. 2005). Added to that, obviously, is that geographic fragmentation is also manifest inside countries, for instance, in the difference between urban (industrial) and rural (agricultural) areas, flatland and mountainous areas, between the Protestant north and the Catholic south in Germany
and the Netherlands, cultural differences such as between Northern and Southern China (as roughly divided by the Huai River – Qin Mountains), between the Flemish and French speaking parts of Belgium, and between North and South Korea (culturally similar, but very different in terms of political-administrative system). There are also inter-regional differences between, for instance, the provinces of Friesland, Holland, and Limburg in the Netherlands, and between the Northeastern and the Southern states in the United States.

Substantive or topical fragmentation of knowledge is not only visible in geographic concentrations in comparative studies, but also in terms of policy, level, and time-period. Adolino and Blake wrote a comparative study that focused on various policy areas in six industrialized countries (in order of appearance in each of their chapters 4-11: USA, Japan Germany, France, UK, and Italy) and the European Union. Their book is written as a “primary text for courses on comparative public policy” (2011, xi), so the comparison is descriptive, uses nominal data, and summarizes existing research. Focusing on welfare policies in OECD countries, Castles uses quantitative-statistical methods to explain similarities and differences in post-war policy changes (1998). His book reports new research. Both these books are examples of cross-policy research conducted within the pages of one book. There is, however, much more comparative research within various policy areas. Now, how many scholars interested in, say, health policy, actively follow comparative research in infrastructure, defense, education, or taxation policies? This topical fragmentation is also a function of disciplinary dispersion: health care policy is of interest to health care professionals (doctors, nurses) but also to political scientists, to scholars of public administration, and to sociologists. Substantive fragmentation is also a function of language. For instance, there are vibrant and fast-growing public administration epistemic communities in African, South- and East-Asian, Latin American, and
western and eastern European countries (nota bene: I am unsure about Middle Eastern countries) but when most of its scholarship is published in a non-English, national language it may not be accessible to colleagues who do not speak (an)other language(s). Having said that, it is important to acknowledge that much public administration scholarship is relevant to a specific national context, and this is more so the case for studies aiming to produce usable knowledge than those that seek to advance theory. Along this line of thought, it remains puzzling that American textbooks are translated into Chinese, Korean and Spanish, while, for instance, Chinese textbooks are not translated into English. It is odd that American public administration scholarship has been so influential in many other parts of the globe, especially since American textbooks and monographs rarely reference non-American literatures (Candler et al. 2010, 840).

Finally, epistemological and methodological fragmentation of knowledge stands in the way of developing law-like generalizations. Epistemological fragmentation is a function of what we can know, and the answer to that varies with discipline or study. By way of clarification, what economists believe they can know about government is very much driven by how they define and perceive their object of knowledge, for instance, by assuming that all people are rent-seeking and maximizing creatures and by using game theory. Anthropologists will focus much more on societal-level descriptions from an emic (insider, symbolic-ethnographic) or an etic (outsider, cultural-materialist) perspective. The challenge for the scholar of public administration is to fruitfully connect these different bodies of knowledge. Methodological fragmentation is that between quantitative-statistical and so-called qualitative methods, the former allowing for large-N studies, the latter for more in-depth research using “thick description” (Raadschelders 2011b). Whether large-N or thick description, all comparative studies suffer from the problem of conceptual transferability.
5. Conceptual Challenges of Comparative Research

The term ‘conceptual transferability’ is used very broadly. It refers to how categories in numerical data collection are defined, as well as to different definitions of similar concepts and different concepts that refer to similar content. With regard to numerical data, when collecting numbers about poverty and unemployment in various countries, it is vital to know how each is defined in those countries. With regard to concepts, one concept can have different meanings in different countries. For instance, a civil servant in the Netherlands is legally defined as someone working in an appointed position in the public sector and the concept excludes political officeholders. In the United Kingdom, a civil servant is sociologically defined as someone working in Whitehall. In France and Germany, there is, from a sociological point of view, a clear distinction between higher (fonctionnaire, Beamte) and lower (employee, Angestellte) level civil servants. A civil servant in China is defined in a juridical sense and includes both political officeholders as well as career administrators (Burns 2001, 81). A particular phenomenon can also be captured in different concepts. For instance, in England, the transfer of tasks and decision-making authority from national government to a sub-national jurisdiction is referred to as *devolution* while on the European Continent it is better known as *decentralization*. Finally, how a phenomenon is perceived influences how a scholar studies it. By way of example, *federalism* in Germany is considered an administrative technique, while in the United States it is seen as characteristic of a balance between state and national government and sometimes – perhaps increasingly so – as the key feature of an overbearing national government.
A second example of conceptual challenges is that what Sartori labelled “conceptual stretching” (1970, 1041). How many properties can and should one capture in one concept? A concept with only few properties is helpful when trying to conduct comparative empirical analysis of many cases, but is weak in specificity. A concept with many properties is helpful with in-depth investigation of cases, but is weak in the range of cases it can capture. This is a problem concerned with the intension or content of a concept. Also, we must wonder about the number of phenomena that we seek to identify with a concept (its extension). When the number of properties is high, the number of phenomena it encapsulates is low; when the former is low, the number of phenomena it applies to is high. Conceptual stretching occurs when the extension of a concept is increased without diminishing its intension, and this is especially a challenge when a most-different systems design is used.

Of a very different nature, yet conceptual as well, is that the main groups of people who read public administration research are academics and practitioners. In scholarly work, the emphasis has shifted in the past 40, 50 years to increasingly sophisticated quantitative-statistical studies, the content of which is less and less accessible to practitioners. Those practitioners who make policy are usually highly educated, but scholarly work is generally not read when it uses too much jargon and requires extensive training in research methods and mathematical models. This is even more the case in political science (Cohn 1999), but the fact that practitioner authorship has declined in several western public administration journals since the 1970s (Raadschelders & Lee 2011, 22-23) should warn public administration scholars that the gap between academe and practice in their study may be widening too.

Finally, concepts used in the study have been labelled as ethnocentric and thus, worldwide trends are assessed in terms originating in Western political-administrative systems
Ethnocentricity occurs when phenomena and trends in another culture are evaluated in the terms of one’s own culture. The language of public administration is distinctly Western, but one could make a case that, for instance, bureaucracy as organizational type is found everywhere. Other ethnocentric interpretations may spring from methods of research, formulation of theories, and choice of research and reform topics as originating in a particular culture. For instance, what is known as the Washington Consensus concerns a set of neo-liberal economic principles that was presented as a reform-package for developing countries, and formulated by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the American Department of the Treasury (Reinert 2008). There is certainly truth to the statement that American public administration is ethnocentric and parochial (Hou et al. 2011, i46), but so is the public administration study in any country. I support developing a global perspective upon public administration, but not when it seeks to supersede the traditional comparative cross-national, cross-policy, cross-level, and (most recently) cross-time perspectives. After all, as much as people and their governments are swept up in global trends beyond their domestic authority and power, the same people and their governments operate within a territorially defined sovereignty.

6. Methodological and Practical Challenges of Comparative Research

The theoretical and conceptual challenges mentioned above also pose a wide variety of methodological and practical challenges. There are at least six methodological challenges. First, how many cases need to be included before we arrive at something that resembles a law-like generalization? It seems that no number of cases is sufficient to answer this question. Second, should we study a few variables in a large number of cases, or a large number of variables in a
small number of cases? The first will allow for formal modeling, the second for a better “thick description” of reality. Third, how can we assure that quantitative and qualitative data collected actually travel well across cases? That is, how can we avoid comparing apples and oranges? Fourth, much comparative research is diachronic and cross-sectional; very little is historical or cross-time. But how can we really understand a case or cases without considering the extent to which the present is embedded in the past? One of the major deficiencies of comparative research on government is the lack of historical studies that use social science concepts and theories and the lack of social science studies that inductively reconstruct the past and trajectories toward to the present on the basis of archival research of primary documents (Raadschelders 2017, 49). Fifth, should we adopt a most similar or a most different systems design and why? Sixth, can we really arrive at law-like generalizations when we know that there are very few developments in a particular society and political-administrative system that truly developed independently from similar developments elsewhere? Scholars must deal with this problem that was first formulated by the British statistician Francis Galton (and known since as the Problem of Galton).

As for the practical challenges, they are just as vexing. Comparative research takes time, if only for the scholar to become sufficiently familiar with a set of other political-administrative systems. It also takes time, because the researcher may find it necessary to develop proficiency in the language(s) of the country or countries studied. Ideally, and especially in the case of in-depth comparative study, the researcher should spend time and conduct fieldwork in the country or countries s/he studies and that will require money. And then, being a study that still tries (and should try) to bridge the interests and pursuits of academics and practitioners, we cannot assume that the results of research are applicable across cultures. In the rush toward solutions, we may
forget that practices and experiences in one country cannot be transplanted to another country when not adapted to the cultural and institutional traditions of that country (see, on this, e.g., Aldrich 1979, 22).

Two examples can illustrate this. First, Dorman Eaton’s study of the British civil service reforms in 1854 as developed by Sir Stafford Northcote and Charles Trevelyan. He carefully studied British practices, identified what was useful to the American context and what could be discarded, and this culminated in the Pendleton Act of 1883. Where necessary, he introduced elements befitting the American context (such as no preference for specific universities; much more emphasis on education in and training for practical skills; open examinations). A second, and contemporary, example of the importance of national political-administrative traditions concerns the success in some, the lackluster performance in other, and the outright failure in yet other countries of New Public Management Reforms. It can simply not be assumed that a set of reforms originating in the UK and New Zealand and focused on increasing efficiency, deregulation and privatization, can be transferred from one country to another and be successful. Whether voluntarily copied or more or less imposed by multilateral actors (such as under the Washington Consensus), NPM reforms have had mixed reception that can at least partially be explained by variation in societal and political-administrative culture (Kisner 2016), and partially by lack of time and incentives (e.g. Mongolia), and/or by substantial social (and wage) inequalities and corruption (e.g., various African, Eastern European and Latin American countries) (Raadschelders & Vigoda-Gadot 2015, ch.7). We know that at least in the United Kingdom, NPM inspired reforms resulted in a government that works a little less well and costs a bit more (Hood and Dixon 2015), but we need much more empirical research into various aspects of NPM-inspired reforms. Thus, a practical challenge is that researchers and public
servants must step away from ideologically inspired reforms, and look with a cold, hard eye at what is possible in the context of contemporary trends, challenges, and perceptions as well as past practices. That means that we can understand what has happened, what is happening, and what we would like to happen only when we place it in its time and context. This leads me into the oft forgotten element in comparative research: the historical dimension.

7. **A Long Historical View and a New Psychological Challenge**

People experience and perceive the changes in their own day and age as rapid, and, in fact, assume that these changes and reforms are occurring more quickly than ever before (see several references in Raadschelders & Bemelmans-Videc 2015, 334-335). Is this really the case? The massive changes in the political-administrative systems of West European countries unfolded in a span of decades, roughly between the 1780s and 1820s, and industrialization resulted in unprecedented changes in the economy. In each of these two periods, the changes were experienced as extremely intense by the ruling elites as well as by the people. Remembering the Luddites in the 1810s, it is reasonable to assume that workers in the weaving trade experienced changes in the production system of woolen cloth to be extremely swift and threatening. The phenomenal speed of industrialization on the European continent from the 1860s on alienated the workforce at large from the production process; the concurrent urbanization estranged people from one another, having moved from the physical, rural communities of old to the imagined, urban communities of the present.

Large-scale social, economic and political changes are always experienced as intense. The contemporary assessment of the size and intensity of change is very much influenced by the
rapidly declined “width of the social present,” and by the unbelievable capability of high-speed information exchange. Comparative scholars in public administration often only focus on diversity and change, but should also consider the extent to which these changes and this diversity are accompanied by continuity. In any time and context, continuity, diversity and change “exist” simultaneously, although in mixes that varies between countries. Change and diversity are experienced and perceived much more intensely than continuity. However, changes are never so encompassing that they leave no trace of continuity and obliterate any evidence of diversity. Also, diversity is never so total that it conceals any similarities between peoples. And if we are to recognize and appreciate that continuity, diversity and change always occur together, we must employ a historical perspective, and especially a long view of time that focuses on more than the past three, four or five decades only.

There are three observations important to comparative and global public administration that can only be made when taking this type of long view. First, looking back at 10,000 years of sedentary life, it is clear that there is convergence across the globe in how humans have structured the lands that they govern and the organizations with which they govern. Slowly but surely, the landmasses of the globe have been incorporated into territorial states which increased in size and decreased in numbers. These territorial states are carved into layered jurisdictions (local, regional, national). With regard to organization, people have increasingly used hierarchy and division of labor to organize for needs and outcomes they could not individually achieve. Both territorially layered and defined jurisdictions and horizontally and vertically differentiated bureaucratic organizations are converging trends in the history of governing. Second, at the same time, it is clear there is substantial divergence in how various communities of people deal with transportation, health care, water management, education, trade, zoning, crime, and so on.
though they live in geographic proximity to one another, it is unlikely that the Dutch will become like Germans, the Japanese like Koreans and Americans like Canadians. Hence, there always has been, and always will be, divergence in what and who people identify with and how they organize to provide for their public functions and collective needs.

The third observation is highly unusual. We start with some observations from evolutionary biology. Humanoids have roamed the earth for a few million years now, and for most of that time, they lived in small bands of 30 up to 50 members. They are social beings and their sociality is expressed through kinship, dominance, alliances and reciprocity. Rules of modern institutions do not come naturally to people. That is, when left to their own devices, humans tend to apply the mindset of living in a small band to modern organizations and that results in nepotism, cronyism, deference to authority, and polite consensus, which are features befitting traditional small-scale society but corrosive in modern societies (Pinker 2010, 8998). Only in the past 10,000 to 12,000 years have humans developed institutions to govern imagined communities. Most, and perhaps all, evolutionary biologists agree that the speed of cultural evolution in the past 10,000+ years has by far outpaced the speed of biological (i.e., genetic) evolution. As people live in ever larger and more densely populated areas and ever more complex societies, they will have to navigate this societal complexity with a psychology that is still designed for small-scale life in bands (Richerson et al. 2003, 388). That they can is because they have designed very complex and extremely variable forms of cooperation and social organization, legal codes, and political institutions (Ayala 2010, 9015). Perhaps we are in the middle of a process where a new kind of human is in the making, as Henrich suggests (2016, 318). He leaves unanswered what that new kind of human is like, but let me give it a try from a public administration perspective.

When living in small, physical communities of 30-50 people formal institutional arrangements are not necessary to help solve conflicts and to assure collaboration for achieving
collective objectives. As people increasingly live in very large imagined communities and many in close proximity to one another, they do need formal institutional arrangements to protect societal stability from internal and external threats. The challenge of living in ever larger, urban communities has been met so far by creating structures, but throughout the past ten millennia people still acted with a psychological make-up that befits living in a physical community.

The past 200 years are very unusual in the history of humankind with regard to citizenship and government. Recent changes in the political-administrative system (i.e., structure) and in the possible role (functions) and formal position (structure) of people as citizens in that system have been substantial. For most of the time that people have lived in sedentary environments, i.e. for some 10,000 years, government has been an oppressive force controlled by a ruler and/or small economic, political, and social elite. Most people are subjects. Following the momentous changes in political-administrative superstructure around the 1800s, people slowly change from peasants and subjects into citizens (cf. Weber 1976; Fisch 2008). From a *longue durée* perspective, it can be argued that in the past 200 years, both people in general and those working in government have been learning to deal with a very different position and role of government in, especially democratic, political system and society. Government has had to adapt to and adopt a service-oriented and social-engineering perspective; people have had to learn that as citizens, they have rights and duties, including the duty to participate in a community much larger than the physical communities of bygone days. From the vantage point of the lifespan of a human being, 200 years feels like a long time, but in the light of history and cultural development, it is not, and it may well be that both citizens and their governments are still finding their way in their new respective roles and positions and in the new type of relationship between citizen and government. That this is a challenge is clear from populist movements in
various countries across the globe (notably, at the moment, in the response to international migration in the USA and in various Western European countries) that thrive by appealing to tribal instincts that developed long ago. When building or reforming institutions, we fail to consider the elements in our psychology that were formed when living in small, egalitarian bands, namely kinship, reciprocity, negative reciprocity against norm violators, reputation and signaling (humans are concerned with what others think of them), leadership (dominance) and status (prestige), and that we identify with marked groups and preferentially imitate in-group members (Richerson & Henrich 2012, 62-64). At the same time, people have been able to create institutions to help govern large-scale, imagined communities. Humankind may be slowly - and with much difficulty - moving away from operating and collaborating (i.e., functioning) upon simple and primal in-group versus out-group distinctions, to a society where these cultural distinctions are surpassed by recognizing that biologically, first and foremost, we belong to one species, Homo sapiens, and that, sociologically, we are all (at least most of us) citizens from a few days after we are born to a few days after we have passed on. That human beings are challenged to balance a genetically programmed inclination toward hierarchy among primates with a social inclination to equitable sharing among hunter gatherers with efforts at dividing and balancing powers, as De Waal (2005, 83, 236) notes, is a process that only started some 200 years ago. The psychological challenge is one of people coming to grips with the new reality of being global citizens with duties and rights and with a service-providing government.
A Comparative and Global Perspective for Our Time

Systematic comparative studies have been pursued for about 200 years. It is in the past 70 years or so that people as citizens, as elected and appointed officeholders, and as scholars have become aware of globalization as a process that poses challenges which can no longer be dealt with on the basis of national, domestic policies. While the ‘traditional’ comparative perspective continues to be necessary by virtue of the fact that there are plenty of challenges which can be (re)solved at the national, domestic level, that comparative perspective must be augmented with a global perspective. Combining those comparative and global perspectives offers the opportunity to capture the dynamism of the time in which we live. However, this is not all. As people perceive and shape the world, they must become aware that, as observers, they are not static and are themselves subject to change. The human species has proven to be very dynamic, not only adapting to the natural environment, but infusing that natural environment with all sorts of artificial, i.e., human-made, institutions. The institutional superstructure that people created over time to ‘run’ complex and densely populated societies, challenges humankind’s most basic instincts of in-group sociality. Consequentially, comparative and global studies of how people govern themselves should not only focus on the structures they have created, but also on how these structures have, in turn, changed the observer. Again, in the light of evolutionary and historical development, the respective positions, roles, and interactions of the people and their government started to change fundamentally more than 200 years ago, and that change is still underway.
References


