Preparing the public service for working in multiethnic democracies: a Survey of the practices of schools of public administration in Central and Eastern Europe

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Public administration education and training can play an important role in advancing goals in Central and Eastern Europe for successful governance of multiethnic democracies and advancement of social and political equity for minorities. A survey conducted for this paper however finds however that there is little common agreement among public administration education schools and training programs about their role in this regard, and little special attention played to addressing such issues in the curriculum or in recruiting minority students for study in public administration. The paper suggests that an active debate is needed with the PA education community about proper roles and activities regarding the role of public administration education in multiethnic communities, and that the NISPAcee network is a promising venue to hold this debate.

1. Introduction

Successful governance of multiethnic democracies and advancement of social and political equity for minorities in Europe are well-recognized goals. The challenge has drawn attention from many sectors, and is being tackled in a wide range of different ways. (Brintnall 2004; Kovacs 2002) Solutions have been viewed variously, and often simultaneously, as a matter of law (Weller 2005), as a matter of education (Tibbetts 2002), as one of social psychology, community organizing, and social integration (Danchin and Cole 2002; Petrova 2002), as a matter of new policy and institution building (Ablyatifov 2004; Krizsán 2004; Marinova 2005), and as one of reform of governance. (Gál 2002) The issue is genuinely multi-dimensional.

This paper explores what the civil service can contribute to achieving these goals, and particularly the role that education and training for public administration can play. It reports on a survey of public administration education and training programs in the region intended to learn how they approach this problems and what progress they are making.

The paper is particularly interested in the work of civil servants who are involved directly with citizens and the community. Typically these officials work at the local government level, or what is sometimes called the “street level.” They both must know what appropriate policy issues about the issues they deal with, but also be effective at implementing it and an understanding the particular circumstances of the citizens they deal with. This is especially

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challenging, and important for achieving goals of inclusion and social equity, when the community itself is diverse in ethnic, racial, religious and other ways; and when there are groups in the population who have traditionally been excluded or underrepresented in public affairs.

So far, the evidence seems mixed at best about how national strategies in Central and Eastern European countries for minority protection and advancement have succeeded in reaching these local and “street level” civil servants and improving their capacity to make an effective difference. The EU Accession Monitoring reports the following, for instance:

In several countries, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia the central bodies responsible for developing and implementing governmental minority protection policy lack the competence to influence local public administration effectively. Thus, efforts to enact reforms at the national level – particularly reforms which run counter to popular attitudes and perceptions resistant to giving minority groups “special treatment” may be undermined by local opposition and sometimes by contradictory local policies. . . . In some cases individuals occupying [local] offices have managed to raise the profile of governmental programmes, to facilitate better communications between Roma communities and local governmental structures, and to increase awareness of the needs of local Roma communities. However, most work with little institutional support, without clear definition of their competencies, and receive little or no specialised training for their positions. (OSI/EU Accession Monitoring Program 2002 p. 28) (emphasis added)

2. Ways Education and Training can Work

Successful multiethnic democracies must achieve at least three goals, including (a) assurance of rights for everyone, (b) equitable delivery of services, and (c) movement toward full inclusion. Each is important and complicated. All require public sector leadership – both political and civil service -- that is alert to these challenges and skilled in managing the social and political change required.

To employ the civil service in meeting these goals, especially at the local level, we must first train it well, both in the initial education that public administrators receive and in the training that follows throughout their careers. A major challenge, thus, rests with the schools of public administration education and with the training institutes.

What’s involved? There are many ways that education and training for the civil service can contribute to building successful multiethnic democracies. In general, the strategies include teaching about management in diverse settings; providing access for minorities to public sector roles, and advancing research and knowledge gathering about the community.

Rule of law and equality under the law. A key responsibility of public administration education and training programs, of course, is to convey the knowledge necessary for effective management. This challenge, conveying appropriate information about laws and regulations, is the same for matters of diversity, minority inclusion, and social justice as it is for any other public responsibility, such as finance, public safety, or health and welfare.
Presumably PA schools are well prepared and skillful at this. It is essential that effective public administration education and training include attention to issues of equality under the law, and of rights of minorities and others in the social and political setting. Most programs recognize this and carry it out well.

**Teaching about management in a diverse setting.** But there is a difference, too, between knowing the laws and carrying them out positively and effectively in socially and political complex situations. Social and ethnic diversity is invariably coupled with inequality of resources, contests about legitimacy, histories of discrimination, and latent or overt conflict. As any police or social welfare officer will tell you, maintaining public order in the face of such conflict is a matter of great social skill and insight as well as formal or technical knowledge. We must prepare the next generation of public officials to understand these tensions and conflicts, to anticipate ways to apply constructive solutions, and to manage in ways that help resolve them rather than inflame them.

**Providing access for minorities to the public sector.** A matter of some less agreement is whether success in building multi-ethnic democracy also requires assuring that minority groups are themselves represented in all stages of the public sector – that they are a part of the public service as well as served well by the public. Efforts to be “inclusive” in these ways have been a major priority of US efforts to address diversity, as they have in many other countries.

To the extent inclusion is considered valuable, the work must start in the schools of public administration to assure that new generations of minority citizens are well prepared for these new roles. This has many dimensions.

**Recruitment of minority students.** One is the effective recruitment of minorities into the training. Even if the door is legally open for everyone to seek training, groups accustomed to being excluded may not walk through that door without some extra efforts to bring them in. Worse sometimes programs that claim they are open to everyone fail to make this known among minority communities, resulting a de facto form of exclusion. Efforts for recruitment are sometimes disparaged as “affirmative action.” But recruitment of minorities need not mean favoritism or exclusion of majorities – it can start just with vigorous outreach to everyone, and with outreach to minorities that is designed to be as effective as possible in gaining their attention and involvement.

**Diversifying the Faculty themselves.** In this same spirit, we need to look to inclusion of minority communities among the teachers as well as the students. This both signals that the training is indeed intended for everyone, and provides an opportunity for greater understanding about the breadth of public needs that students are trained to meet.

**Managing a diverse classroom.** Sometimes, as education and training programs themselves become more diverse, the differences and conflicts of the larger society can appear within the classroom itself. Education and training programs should be attentive to the needs of their own instructors to understand and manage diversity in the classroom. (Canadian School of Public Service; Nelson 1999)
Projects to advance public sector programs. Finally, there is much that public administration schools can do to support programs and research in support of a diverse public service beyond classroom education. Much research is need in policy and practice in this area. Programs can be developed to detect and recognize excellence in public sector practice relevant to successful multiethnic democracy – housing, public health, public safety, or education projects that promoted exclusion, for instance. A program of “public sector excellence” in this area might be effective. Also, awards can be given to individual public servants, perhaps recognizing people from different minority groups who can stand as important public models.

3. Survey of Public Administration Education in CEE

We know how important public administration education and training is for the future of public service, and how big the gap is. But little is known about what public administration training and education programs in the region are doing to respond to multi-ethnic communities and diversity. I thus set out to see what can be learned about current activities in CEE public administration schools to address these questions.

With the help of the NISPAcee secretariat, I sent a very brief survey to the heads of NISPA member PA institutions. The survey asked very basic questions about the number of students they had, the numbers who belonged to minority groups, how they were recruited, how well they fared in the programs, and what new attention was being given to training how to manage in diverse settings. The survey was open-ended. A copy is in Appendix A.

Eleven programs responded to the survey. While the number was not large, it was at least geographically diverse, covering 9 countries in the region.²

Percent of minorities trained. Most programs indicated that “very few” of the students in their public administration programs are from minority communities, though the circumstances differed among them, with several describing the situation as “very, very few.” Students from border countries were most often identified as the included minorities – e.g. frequently Russian students were named in former USSR countries. In some Eastern European countries, Hungarians were identified as the minority community represented, but never were the Roma so identified. One school reported the minority students were: “Armenians, Osetians, and Americans.”

Steps to recruit minorities. None of the schools took any special steps to recruit minority students to their programs, and only one indicated it was something they have thought about doing.

² The individual institutions were promised anonymity. The institutions were in the following countries: Serbia, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Armenia, Latvia, Romania, Lithuania, and Georgia.
**Percent minority faculty.** About half the programs reported some of their faculty were from minority communities, though percentages were small and in many cases it appears the nationalities teaching were not from the underrepresented communities within the country – e.g. German and American faculty were cited in some cases.

**Success of minority students.** I asked if the minority students in programs were able to complete their work and find employment at the same level as majority students, and no program reported any problems in this case. One said that language can sometimes be barrier. On the affirmative side, one program director noted that minority graduates may often do better than other students because “the community of the minority takes the responsibility for every one of its members. Nothing like that happens among the representatives of the majority.”

**Training on “how to manage in diverse communities.”** None of the programs indicated that they have any special courses or strategies to teach students about being public administrators in diverse communities.

**Research or other activities.** Three of the eleven programs indicated that there were relevant activities in their school besides teaching. One reported a research project on “the ethnic policy in the region;” and another cited “some research prepared by the students” during their studies. A third school indicated they were about to join a European Centre for Minority Issues project, with foundation funding, to look at EU political integration and minority mobilization.

4. **Overall Survey Conclusions**

From this short look at a small number of institutions, one has to conclude that formal attention to minority inclusion in public administration is not a major priority for public administration schools in the region. Respondents suggested three very different commentaries on why this might be the case.

**Questioning Special Emphasis.** One set of arguments said it was unacceptable to place special emphasis on ethnic or other group characteristics. They expressed a considered detachment from affirmative outreach to minorities, on the grounds of equity. One respondent reported, for instance, “recruitment in public administration is based on formally required competencies (educational degree; special skills); ethnic minority candidates are in the same position as others – they get recruited if they fulfill the criteria.” This program could not report on how many ethnic minorities are in their program, however, because they said they do “not keep records on nationality or ethnic origin of the participants.”

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3 While the number of responses was small, one would have to assume that programs that DID have active programs on this subject would be the most likely to respond to the survey. There is little evidence that this study has overlooked substantially high rates of emphasis on minority outreach in PA education in the region.
“Not on the Agenda.” A second perspective indicated that these questions were simply not “on the agenda.” As one put it, “we don’t have special programs and at the moment are not planning any. This appears to be also the overall practice of public administration here – no special methods of recruiting minority officials, or special training for regions with diverse communities…”

Absence of Strategy. And a third indicated an interest in broadening inclusion of ethnic minorities, but without a developed strategy to do so. As one put it: we have few minorities but “are trying hard to have more; [but we have not program to recruit] except constant discussion with the relevant people.”

Clearly, there is no consensus within the public administration schools surveyed here on just what their responsibilities are with respect to inclusion of ethnic minorities in their training programs or other issues related to this, and little clear direction on how to proceed where there is an interest in taking action.

5. What CEE Schools and NISPAcee might do

Given the findings of this survey, it is difficult to recommend what new steps that public administration schools in this region, or the NISPAcee as an organization might take. The evident lack of activity in the PA schools in the face of strong arguments that there is an important role for the schools and the network to play suggests first it is time for an active debate about just what these responsibilities are.

The topics for discussion include some of the following themes. Within these topics of course are also suggestions about actions that public administration schools might begin to think about taking if they are so inclined.

What is the role of public administration in building successful multi-ethnic democracy? This is the basic question to begin with. Most observers probably agree that equitable application of the law and even-handed delivery of social services by civil servants is essential and always having room for improvement. The more debated question is whether the composition of the civil service and the diversity management skills of civil servants themselves must overtly reflect the diversity problems to be faced. That is, does the civil service best meet the needs of ethnic diversity by being BLIND to differences or EMBRACING differences among citizens? Does it matter for the successful inclusion of minorities into society that some civil servants look and talk like them?

Does public administration education and training have an affirmative role to play in preparing members of underrepresented ethnic minorities for public service? This question of course is the big one. Should public administration education and training go to extra efforts to bring ethnic minorities into their training? Can such affirmative outreach be done in ways that are still fair to majorities?
What sort of curriculum is most effective for teaching public administrators to manage effectively in support of multiethnic democracies? Is the best curriculum strategy to focus on law relating equal treatment and rights of minorities? (Kovacs 2004) Is there also a need for training on so-called “street level” interactions with citizens of different cultural and social backgrounds?4

What about the faculty – is it important that they reflect the diversity of the multiethnic community? If so, how does a program provide a diverse faculty when there may be few qualified scholars and trainers from the minority communities. Can use of part-time teachers from minority communities, frequent use of minority “speakers” in classes, internships in diverse settings, and so forth substitute for a shortage of minority faculty?

How can relevant data about class and ethnic characteristics of students best be gathered? Does effective outreach to students from ethnic minority communities require gathering and maintaining data about such ethnic or racial characteristics? What about gender? How can effective progress in inclusion be measured if no records about underrepresented groups are maintained? Is it a threat to rights to seek such data?

Who needs to be included in discussions about the role of public administration education and training in building successful multi-ethnic democracy? Should these discussions occur first within the academic and training setting? Should they include public officials – i.e. the leaders of government and NGO offices who will be employing the next generation of trained public administration?5 What about working with leaders of ethnic minority communities?

How can a conversation about these topics be started and continued? If advocates for minority protection and advancement hope to achieve lasting change, they must encourage more attention to transformation of the civil service, at the “street level” to help implement this. NISPAcee seems ideally suited to be the forum then to host such a discussion about the roles, strategies, and performance of educational and training institutions in public administration to advance solutions to diversity.

5 I recall observing a Western European Public Administration program facing this question. They had two program – one a traditional academic PA program for young students; and one an evening PA program for adults who already had jobs in local government and the police department. The traditional program was taught almost entirely by white males from the majority community and the students thought this was fine; the program with working students had a completely different emphasis, with much attention to how to manage with diversity and with many teachers from different minority communities, because the students demanded these skills for their work “on the streets” of the city.
6. Conclusions

This empirical look at a small number of public administration education and training programs among the NISPAcee community suggests that there is little agreement about the proper role of education and training for preparing public administrators to face the emerging needs of multiethnic democracies. And little is being done. A vigorous discussion about the proper role of the community to face these new issues is overdue and very important.

APPENDIX A

The Questionnaire

Dear NISPAcee Institutional Member:

I am writing about a study I am conducting for the NISPAcee Working Group IV on Democratic Governance of Multiethnic Communities. I serve as co-coordinator of the working group along with Jana Krimpe, Tallinn University of Educational Sciences, Estonia. I am preparing a paper for the working group meeting at the NISPA conference in May. I am hoping you can help.

Our Working Group is interested in promoting inclusive policies that are responsive to the needs of ethnically diverse communities and that help to advance the status of minority communities and promote the well-being of the majority and minority groups together. Recently, our agenda has grown to include attention to "effective education and training for public officials to respond to multi-ethnic communities, and ... the role of schools of public affairs and administration to improve this education and training."

We know how important public administration education and training is for the future of public service. But little is known about what public administration training and education programs in the region are doing to respond to multi-ethnic communities and diversity.

I think a very brief survey of these efforts would be valuable. Based on what we learn from a survey, the Working Group will be able to develop its agenda further, NISPAcee can perhaps develop a project that will benefit member programs such as your own, and program directors can learn more about what others are doing.

Could your please send to me very brief answers to the following questions about your program.

This is informal. There is no need for you to do extra research about these questions. Please just answer those questions for which you have some information, giving your best estimate of the answer. I will keep all responses confidential. I will only report summaries of all the answers, and not reveal the comments from your institution or any other one without your permission.

Please email your responses back to me at brintnall@apsanet.org.

Here are the questions:

1. In what country is your program located?

2. a) About how many students study or are trained in public administration in your program per year? (please just estimate a number: e.g. about 20; about 100 etc.)

   b) Approximately how many of these students in your program are members of ethnic minorities. (e.g. very few; one-quarter; etc.) What ethnicity are they?

3. Do you take any special steps to recruit ethnic minorities to become students in your program for the study of public administration? If so, what are they?

4. Are any of your faculty or trainers from ethnic minority groups? About what percentage of all your faculty or trainers are ethnic minority members?

5. Are there any differences in how ethnic minority students do in your program or training? Do they complete the courses or degrees at the same rate as other students? Do they find jobs or advance
in their careers in the public service in the same ways as other students? What do you think explains any difference in the success or lack of success of ethnic minority students compared to other students?

6. Do you include any special courses or have other activities in your curriculum or training to teach students or trainees about how to be managers in diverse communities? If so, what do you do?

7. Is any research about public policies responsive to the needs of ethnically diverse communities conducted in your program? What kinds of research projects are they?

8. I would like to create a list of different activities that programs like yours are using to recruit ethnic minority students to public administration, or use to teach or train public administrators about management in diverse communities. If you have such an activity that you would like me to list, and can give me permission to use your name and your program in the list, please describe the activity here. We can share this listing among all of the NISPA programs.

Thank you very much. I promise to send you a copy of the paper when it is finished. Please email me if you have any questions. I look forward to seeing you in Moscow.

Best regards,

Michael Brintnall

APPENDIX B

References


