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LATVIJAS INTERESES EIROPAS SAVIENĪBĀ

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Challenges and Opportunities of Research Methodology on Intergovernmental Coordination

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It is clear that intergovernmental coordination is a sophisticated phenomenon, therefore, the analysis of the issues related to intergovernmental relations and coordination are similarly complex. Even coordination and cooperation are required by the different approaches and analysis of the elements on these issues. Hence, it is an important part of the activities of IGCOORD COST Action to define a common methodological framework. Due to the interdisciplinarity of the research network, the methods should not be unified, but coordinated.

Keywords: policy coordination, research methods, vertical and horizontal coordination.

Starpvaldību koordinācija ir sarežģīta, tāpēc vienlīdz sarežģīta ir ar starpvaldību attiecībām un politikas koordināciju saistīto jautājumu analīze. IGCOORD COST akcijas pētniecības tīkls mēģina definēt kopēju metodoloģisko ietvaru politikas koordinācijas analīzei. Tā kā politikas koordinācija ir starpdisciplināra, metodēm nav jābūt vienotām, bet savstarpēji koordinētām.

Atslēgvārdi: pētniecības metodes, politikas koordinācija, vertikālā un horizontālā koordinācija.

Introduction

Challenges and opportunities of intergovernmental coordination were previously analysed in Policy Brief 1 of IGCOORD. It has been emphasised that intergovernmental coordination is impacted by several factors and the different interpretations of Intergovernmental Coordination have been analysed. It has been summarised by that Policy Brief, that “*this COST Action generates theoretically and empirically well-founded and practical hands-on knowledge on how to organize intergovernmental coordination in multiple settings. In this policy brief, we provide a first outline of the basic challenges of coordination and give hints at paths – to be further developed in the near future – how to improve the efficiency of vertical and horizontal coordination.*”

It is clear that intergovernmental coordination is a sophisticated phenomenon, therefore, the analysis of the issues related to intergovernmental relations and coordination are similarly complex. Even coordination and cooperation are required by the different approaches and analysis of the elements on these issues. Hence, it is an important part of the activities of IGCOORD COST Action to define a common methodological framework. Due to the *interdisciplinarity* of the research network, the methods should not be unified, but coordinated. The main aim is to build a complex system, with ‘interfaces’ of the work of the different working groups.

The challenge of intergovernmental coordination

The main element of the IGCOORD COST Action is its *inter- and multidisciplinary nature*. It is a network of researchers and experts from the various fields of social sciences: political science, sociology, economics and business studies, international studies, and legal studies. Therefore, these different approaches should be coordinated, especially in the first stage of the network. This Policy paper is focusing on these issues.

Firstly, different methods of comparative analysis will be distinguished. The first level of the comparative analysis is the comparison of the different systems of given countries. In this analysis, countries are compared and the methodological unity is provided by a unified view. Thus, the methods and

viewpoints of the analysis are defined in the first – introductory – chapter of these books. Practically, the content of the given country studies (chapters) is determined by this introductory chapter. Therefore, a unified view is followed by country studies. These books will mainly be composed of the works of several authors. Typically, country studies are written by experts from the given country. The editor and the author of the methodological (introductory) chapter and the closing, summarising chapter is typically an internationally accomplished researcher.

The second approach is the comparison of the *different institutions*. In this approach, not the countries but the institutions are compared, and the solutions of the given countries are reviewed *within* the comparative analysis of the given legal institutions. These volumes have typically multiple authors, as well, but the one legal institution is analysed by one author: thus, the analysis is a transnational one.

If we look at the recent research in the field of intergovernmental coordination, the main method and approach is the first level of comparison. The majority of the books written in the last decade on comparative administrative law belong to the first level of the analysis. In the last decade, the second method became more recent, but the comparison of the given countries prevailed as well. A specific combination has evolved, as well. The most significant, model countries and several other countries which have an interesting system or whose systems have altered significantly and are directly compared but the main legal institutions are compared.

The different approaches of the research on intergovernmental coordination

First of all, the general methods of social sciences should be coordinated. The analysis of intergovernmental coordination has different sides and elements. The different methods can be distinguished as *quantitative and qualitative*.

First of all, there is a place for quantitative analysis. The first issues are to build a database of quantitative databases which can be applied by the researchers and stakeholders participating in the activities of IGCOORD Cost Action.

Secondly, these databases should be analysed by the different Working Groups and partners together with Working Group 5 (of the IGCOORD), which is responsible for the research coordination issues. The analysis should especially focus on the comparativeness and methodology (especially the differences in methodology) of these databases.

Thirdly, the use of such databases must be evaluated. It should be built a recommendation on the application of the databases, focusing on the comparativeness of the analysis and the coordination of the different databases.

These databases are mainly the databases of Eurostat, the OECD and the national databases. As part of the preliminary analysis, it has been mentioned, that there are differences between the methodology of them which should be analysed and cooperated by the participants and partners of the COST Action.

Secondly, **qualitative analysis is inevitable** during the cooperation of the network.

Intergovernmental coordination has important *informal elements*, which cannot be analysed by quantitative methods. Therefore, the *methodology of qualitative analysis* should be defined by the working group, especially the methodology of :

- *interviews*: especially the subjects of the interviews and the methods (structuralised or semi-structuralised interviews, in several cases life stories);
- control methods of the interviews should be developed; and
- it is a requirement of refining qualitative data.

As part of the qualitative and even quantitative analysis, the *contextualisation and the impact on society should be analysed*. There are different methods for the analysis of the impact (surveys etc.). These methods should be discussed, especially if different surveys are used, and their application should be coordinated (or focus should be made on one survey – for example, ESS). The role of the media analysis of these topics must also be taken into account as it has become an important element in recent research, in particular the role of the media in the postmodern, ‘post-truth’ time, especially focusing on the analysis of the narratives.

Different Approaches to Intergovernmental Coordination

Institutional analysis is partly based on the analysis of the regulatory environment (especially the legal regulation on the topic) and the actual analysis of the political environment of the institutions. The legal analysis is based on the legal norms, which includes the analysis of legal provisions, major decisions (courts, but mainly constitutional court decisions) and other soft law documents. It should be a wide range of analyses, the general forms of coordination, the coordination of the development issues and the coordination of the policies should be analysed. Similarly, it should be considered to analyse the new forms of coordination, for example, the impact of the 'platform governance' and the 'smart city' concepts, as institutional issues.

It should be emphasised that the tasks and responsibilities of the different (administrative) units and bodies are significantly impacted by their approach to their constitutional status. The general framework of the powers and duties of these bodies is defined by constitutional law. This influence may seem decisive, but it may be "overwritten" by the sectoral regulations. Therefore, the institutional differences between unitary and federal states and the differences between regionalised and 'traditional' unitary states should be analysed. Because the borders between these categories are blurred, for that reason, the actual cooperation should be analysed.

These units, as part of the national governance systems, are tasked with elements of these sectoral policies. Therefore, the organisation, procedure and service provision system of the municipal tasks are strongly impacted by the approach and model of the sectoral policies. The role of the different administrative units is influenced by the chosen model of sectoral policies. The territorial structure, the share of the tasks between the public and private sector, the share of the responsibilities, tasks, and powers between the central and local government (and in federal states between the federation, the member states and the local governments) are mainly defined by the sectoral regulations. These rules are significantly impacted by the sectoral models and policies. The social tasks and responsibilities are a good example of this influence. After Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen 1990) three main social welfare models can be distinguished: the liberal or (Anglo-Saxon) model which is based on

the means-tested benefits and services and the “lender of last resort” role of the state, the continental (or Bismarckian or conservative) model which is based on the social security systems and the Nordic (or social democrat) model which is based on the universal benefits and services. Different administrative tasks are induced by these models. For example, the municipalities of the Anglo_saxon countries have broad social competencies. Because the liberal welfare model is based on the means-tested benefits and services and therefore information on the recipients of the services is very important and the municipalities have better access to information, the role of the local government is important. Similarly, the role of the continental local governments is just a subsidiary of the social welfare system. The Bismarckian model is based on the social security (social insurance) model which is managed by the central government or nationally (exceptionally regionally) organised corporative governments, the local government system are responsible for the subsidiary means-tested benefits and services. Although the social tasks of the municipalities are strongly impacted by the chosen welfare model the influence is not a one-way one, it is practically an interaction. A good example is the Scandinavian welfare model and the role of the Scandinavian local governments. The Scandinavian welfare model is based on universal benefits and services. Therefore, the social tasks and responsibilities of the public sector are very broad. These services could be provided by the central state, as well. Although this model could result in a centralised service provision and management system, the tradition and the approach of the Nordic local government caused a model which is based on the broad responsibilities of the Scandinavian municipalities. As I have mentioned, this is an interaction: the responsibilities of these municipalities are very broad, but because of the universal approach to social services and benefits the services are regulated by the central legislation in detail. The quality and the level of the service provisions could not depend on the local needs and opportunities. Therefore, the scope of the local decision-making is very limited: the majority of the decision are made by these central regulations.

Intergovernmental relations and coordination are influenced by the spatial structure of the given country, as well. The spatial structure and the fragmentation of the administrative systems have a strong impact on the given systems. This impact is not a one-way type, but it can be characterised

as an interaction. The responsibilities of the administrative bodies of a given country can be strongly influenced by the spatial structure. The countries with fragmented spatial structure have could perform other tasks than the countries with a concentrated administrative model. For example, the small municipalities have limited economic performance, and therefore they could perform fewer services. Similar problems have evolved in the fragmented French and Italian municipal systems, as well. Therefore, the concept of *concentration* became a current topic of comparative research. It is at the same time linked to the concept of decentralisation. The *economies of scale* problem of public services have evolved in modern countries in the last decades, due to the transformation of the public services. This has led to the transformation of administrative structures: larger entities have evolved. This process is described in the literature as the *concentration of the administrative system*.

The structure of European public service systems has changed in the last decades, too. One of the central challenges everywhere is the economies of scale due to the developments in the field of public services and the related financial challenges. The result is a significant transformation in the spatial structure of the European administrative systems.

The tasks of the administrative units can be different if the public service system – *in general* – is diverse in the given countries. A convergence process could be observed after WWII and during the “*Les Trentes Glorieuses*” (the period between 1945 and 1975) when the welfare state concept based on Keynesian economics ruled the public service provision systems in Europe. The collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system and the economic difficulties after the oil crisis in 1973 caused the breakdown of the former Keynesian economic policies of Western democracies. The neoliberal critics of this policy – which was drafted by the New Right – strengthened. The New Public Management (NPM) reforms were based on these critics. Several new challenges – which needed answers – resulted from the NPM reforms themselves. Several theories evolved during the 1990s and 2000s which tried to correct the problematic elements of the NPM reforms. Among these theories, the *Public Choices* and the *Good Governance* models have impacted all local government reforms of the millennium.

The impact of concept of the service provision system has an influence on the *constitutional status* of the local governments and on the *sectoral* policies, as well. Several economic, social and cultural rights were institutionalised in the (national) constitutions, but this institutionalisation has different levels and models. The intergovernmental relations and coordination have been influenced by these transformations because the tasks provided by the different administrative units are the realisation of these rights.

As we have mentioned earlier, economic analysis is linked to quantitative and qualitative analysis, but we have detailed economic data. As a preliminary problem, it is detected by the experts, that the two major databases (OECD and Eurostat) have differences, and even the national data shows several different elements. It should be analysed, how these differences can be refined and eliminated during the analysis.

Conclusions

It should be emphasized that the methods of comparison should be multi-dimensional. These tasks are strongly impacted by policies and the politics of the given countries, and these tasks are influenced by the spatial structure. The responsibilities of the municipalities are impacted by the economy and the approach of the public services. Last but not least, the analysis could be distorted by the different approaches of the local government. Therefore, the methods of the different social sciences are widely used. This methodological base could result in an informative analysis of intergovernmental coordination which could show its main characteristics.

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