



Taking the Pulse of Public Administrations in Europe

Outcome of the European Public Sector Award 2009



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More than a year ago the European Public Sector Award (EPSA) was launched by EIPA and was supported by 15 countries, the European Commission and some private sponsors. The purpose was to bring together the best, most innovative and efficient performers from all levels of public administration, in a fair and open competition. The applicants competed in four different categories, ranging from (1) *performance improvement in public service delivery*, (2) *citizen involvement and (3) partnership working to (4) leadership and management for change*. Although it is difficult to compare projects and actions at different levels of governance and from different sectors, some clear trends can be observed which reflect what really is going on in the public administration of today. The award was launched at the same time that the financial crises hit the economies in Europe, forcing the public administration to rethink their resources and budgets for the coming years. This led in many cases to a situation where a process of continuous innovation was strengthened; thereby countering the argument that public administration is slow, not innovative and that the routines are jeopardising development. A general observation was that innovation is taking place within public administration among the back-curtain of economic restraint, uncertainty about the future and a growing focus on the performance and quality of delivery in public administration in times of recession. Although the demand for changes comes from the citizens and are then articulated by the politicians, the actual move and design takes place within the services.



Mr Gerd Leers, former Mayor of Maastricht, Ms Marga Pröhl, Director-General of EIPA, Mr Alexander Heichlinger, Manager EPSA 2009 and Expert, EIPA Barcelona

The nominees and the award winners were presented in Maastricht on **4-6 November 2009** at a major event, which was co-financed by the European Commission and supported by the Town Hall of Maastricht and the Province of Limburg. In brief, the former Mayor of Maastricht, Mr G.B.M. Leers, welcomed the 250 EPSA 2009 participants to the city's Town Hall on the evening of Wednesday 4 November, where he, together with EIPA's Director-General, Ms Marga Pröhl, and the EPSA Manager, handed out the best practice certificates to 40 different organisations (details under www.epsa2009.eu). This marked the official starting point of two promising days devoted to innovative problem-solving approaches within our four highly relevant European thematic areas, which offered the participants from more than 25 countries the opportunity to exchange and learn from the EPSA 2009 experience.

The activities continued on Thursday 5 November at the Provincial Government House of Limburg with the EPSA 2009 symposium. In plenary sessions, leading figures and notabilities, such as: Vladimir Špidla, the Former European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, from the Swedish Presidency; Mr Mats Odell, Minister for Local Government, Public Administration and Financial Markets; and Mr Hessels, Vice Governor of Economic Affairs of Limburg, discussed the future challenges facing public sector actors in the new global environment and the importance of administrative capacity building to address them. In conclusion, several of these high-level speakers agreed on its relevance, and thus officially expressed their political support for the continuation of the European Public Sector Award scheme for the forthcoming years.

The most anticipated part of the programme took place on the evening of the same day. During a two-hour ceremony, the 2009 EPSA award winners were announced and presented in the presence of Mr Siim Kallas, Vice President of the European Commission and the Dutch State Secretary, Ms Ank Bijleveld, present for this occasion on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

The symposium concluded with the four parallel thematic workshops on Friday 6 November, during which the award nominees and EPSA 2009 winners presented and discussed their projects in detail.

Following a multiple-step, fair and impartial evaluation process, including an online evaluation (1st Step), a consensus meeting (2nd Step) as well as onsite visits to a small number of short-listed projects per theme (3rd Step for validation purposes), an independent jury (4th Step) selected the award trophy winners for the EPSA 2009 edition:

Performance Improvement in Public Service Delivery (Theme I)

Regional Platform for e-Services for all - e-Bourgogne (France), which is an online based system that offers enterprises access to public markets. All public bodies use a single platform that offers access to all public markets and also functions as a one-stop-shop for all public aids dedicated to small- and medium-sized enterprises. The project has shown to save time and money for business society. It is an example of successful horizontal and vertical coordination, where actors from different levels of government and from a large number of different sized local bodies are working together.

Citizen Involvement (Theme II)

Cologne Participatory Budgeting (Germany) is a project involving citizens via the internet in the preparation of the budget of the City. The project created the opportunity for citizens to participate in designing the municipal budget focusing on three areas – playgrounds, streets and sports – by setting up an e-Platform. This initiative determined a lot of discussions, but also proposals, ideas and corrections. In total, 10 231 participants, 4973 proposals, 9184 comments and overall 52 746 assessments were carried out. Through this new method a new culture of participation was created based on transparency and ability to activate huge and different target groups. Currently, and in the context of a wider approach, there are 38 municipalities in Germany which have either introduced a participatory budget or executing participatory budgeting for the second or third time.



Plenary session in Provincial Government House on Thursday 5 November 2009

New Forms of Partnership Working (Theme III)

The Oldham Local Strategic Partnership (United Kingdom) project – a cooperation between entities with different core objectives (in principle), i.e. several statutory bodies, third sector agencies and the private sector joined forces and built a partnership with the long-term aim of reviving the declining local economy, raising the level of local aspirations and addressing underlying ethnic tensions, which went well beyond their statutory obligation to cooperate.

Leadership and Management for Change (Theme IV)

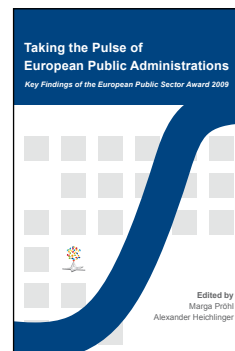
Management in the San Cugat City Council (Spain). The traditional expenses culture of a municipality public administration, where budgets are to be spent, was changed into a cost culture which is based on the continuing optimisation of economic resources by introducing a contract between politicians and top public managers (*PACTE*). In the contract, they agree on long-term vision and short-term actions. This change in management and political culture resulted not only in more efficient public organisation, but achieved the objective of both, the politicians and public managers thinking in the same direction and having the same values, therefore making better policies.

Based on an analysis of all the applications submitted, we can observe the following changes and trends in public administration from all levels in Europe:

- An increased focus on **citizen orientation**, including a strengthened focus on the quality of the service delivery. This includes both the direct involvement of citizens in different processes and the quality of the information given to citizens. Citizen involvement is most likely to be pitched at local level, the role of national governments may, in the foreseeable future, be limited to promoting, encouraging and facilitating the adoption of frameworks, principles and guidelines. This element clearly highlights that the sector is also a service provider in the society.
- The **use of new technology** is regarded as a key element for economic progress and enables quality to be increased at all levels and in all actions taken by the public administration. Not surprisingly, internet-based systems are still the most common instrument for improving service delivery; a technology component was identified in almost all applications of the EPSA 2009. ICT is a fantastic tool for opening up government and public administrations, but there are also certain risks connected

- to its use (e.g. protection of privacy and integrity; the question of democracy and costs). The recommendation here is to always weigh up the costs against the benefits. ICT and integration are not goals in themselves: they are tools for performance improvement in public service delivery.
- Reduction of **administrative burdens** is high on the agenda at all levels of governance and is therefore the driving force behind changes in most public administrations. Programmes are presented and actions are taken from a multiple angle including administrative change, better regulation and focus on impact of regulations. In many ways the spotlight here is on the traditional role of the public administrator, namely as the regulator. The actions described in the applications include saving costs and time for businesses and citizens, recognising that "good governance" is strongly linked to the management of the societies.
 - Increased recognition of the need for **vertical and horizontal coordination** of matters related to both internal national initiated actions and tasks related to European Integration. There are several **new formulas of partnership working** which are directly related to the above-mentioned point about citizens' focus and quality in service delivery, since there is a growing demand from both citizens and business. Political and senior level support for partnerships is important, but they work better if they are primarily driven by the enthusiasm of those responsible for making them work rather than being imposed on a top-down basis. The likelihood of success of partnerships is linked to several criteria, e.g. the clarity of objectives for formation of the partnership, joint decision making or the resource allocation as an indicator for commitment. In summary, partnerships are not the only answer to modern public management, but they can be one of the (needed) answers to deal with the challenges of contemporary public service delivery, i.e. it is an essential tool in the toolbox for public entities.

- **Leadership, strategic management and organisational development** is increasingly being seen as key factor to success. Against the background of the **ageing of society and the subsequent "fight" for talent**, HR managers from most European public sectors are facing the challenge to review their recruitment and career management systems in order to recruit and retain the most competent people. At the same time, they also have to adjust HRM more to the needs of older employees. And finally, there are enhanced trends to decentralise certain HR practices (e.g. performance-related pay, training/development, performance management, disciplinary matters) from central level towards a more decentralised level (e.g. unit level), as well as to improve the professional and managerial competencies.



The conclusions are that changes in the public administrations are both demand driven, come as a result of reduced resources and are also process driven, reflecting the diversity and variety in the sector. Two publications (the EPSA 2009 project catalogue and a full research report) highlight these facts and can be downloaded free of charge at www.epsa2009.eu.



EIPA is now being mandated by the EPSA Steering Committee to begin the preparations for and secure the financing of the next edition, which is planned to take place in 2011.

NOTES

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The EPSA Award 2009, created by Mr Leyendeckers, B.J.