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## STATE OF THE FIELD

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# HOW PUBLIC POLICY WAS INSTITUTIONALISED AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE IN SLOVAKIA

**Ľudmila Malíková**

Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences,  
Comenius University

**Ľudmila Malíková**—Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University Bratislava  
Contact: Odbojárov 10/A, P.O. Box 129, Bratislava 25, 820 05,  
e-mail: malikova@fses.uniba.sk

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Central European Journal of Public Policy

Vol. 2—№ 1—July 2008—pp 74–81

ISSN 1802–4866

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In 2007 the first MA students graduated from the Institute of Public Policy of the Comenius University in Bratislava, and in the autumn the Institute taken in its first PhD students. However, the path to institutionalising the teaching of Public Policy in Slovakia was far from straightforward, and its birth was the result of a lot of work carried out at the academic, NGO and government level.

At the outset of my reflections on how it all came to pass I would like to explain that I will only focus on the most important events leading to the creation of Public Policy as a university subject in which I myself was in some way a participant or observer. I make no claim to be covering all the many activities that contributed to the result we have now achieved. In general terms, public policy, just like political science, was yet to be discovered as an academic discipline and research field.

The first steps towards building up the study of public policy were made at Comenius University (UK). In 1991, Miroslav Kusý, our first Rector after No-

vember 1989, began the competitive recruitment of the lecturing staff for a new Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. I have fond memories of his time in the Department, which was out of the ordinary in many ways. Professor Kusý's foreign contacts, and his efforts to bring as many of them as possible to the Department, meant it was a very exciting time for us as novice 'political scientists'. At about the same time, we began the struggle to introduce new teaching methods, and had to get used to the previously uncommon interaction with the global academic community, including gaining new knowledge through requalifying abroad—our lecturers had originally studied sociology, philosophy or history. The Department of Political Science implemented the unwritten model of 'learning by doing', whereby every lecturer had the chance to use the system of grants for spending periods at prestigious foreign universities, and thus to acquire prestige and authority among the students of political science.

I clearly remember my first trip abroad, which took me to the London School of Economics, on a Masaryk Grant. For the first time in my life, I was able to attend Western professor's lectures and talk about contemporary problems of democracy and its effective functioning at the level of state, region or local self-government. I dusted off my original 1960s education as a sociologist in the libraries of London, which fascinated me with their wealth of literature about new methods of governance, how bureaucracies function, and the problems of public sector management. In the post-communist world, changes in the system of government and management were high on our agenda. I gradually became acquainted with the research work looking at local government and the problems of public administration and public policy which was being conducted at foreign universities such as Durham University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Oslo University, Leiden University and George Washington University. Thanks to foreign grants (e.g. Tempus, Jan Hus Programme, Patočka Scholarship, ECES Programme), I had the honour to establish contact and collaboration with leading professors in the field such as Richard Chapman, Harald Baldersheim, David Roberts, John Gibbons, Peter Barberies, Frank Carr, Michal Harmon, and Howard Elcock.

As a result, by 1995 I was able to prepare a course on Public Policy and Public Administration for the Department of Political Science. Over the next few years this developed into a subject specialisation which contained a range of modules: Public Policy, Public Administration and Local Self-Government, New Public Management and Social Policy. Gradually, students began to apply to take this option if they were interested in writing M.A diploma dissertations looking at public policy or in continuing with doctoral studies in the field. From 2000, I began to offer a specialization in Public Policy and Social Policy at

the PhD level together with Iveta Radičová. This was particularly attractive to students who realised how important the subject was for professional employment in government ministries or parliament, and also for political parties that needed political analysts.

One result of the attempts to establish public policy as an academic discipline was an international conference that the Department of Political Science at Comenius University organised on 22–23 September 2000 to mark the tenth anniversary of its foundation. It was entitled *Democracy and the State based on the Rule of Law in the Context of the Development of Political Science*. The deliberations of the section on *Public Policy* could be described as the first discussion forum in Slovakia devoted to conceptualising the issues involved, and were published.<sup>25</sup> In 2003, the first textbook on public policy (*Public Policy: Actors and Processes*) for Slovak students was published.<sup>26</sup> Then in 2005, Katarína Staroňová of Comenius University's Department of Political Science became the first doctoral student in Slovakia to successfully defend a thesis specialising on Public Policy in Slovakia (*Capacity to Govern in Transition Countries: The Case of Slovakia and Croatia*, FIFUK Bratislava, 2005).

At more or less the same time that these activities were taking place on the academic front, involvement with public policy questions was also developing in the non-Network governmental sector. In 1998, the Secretariat of the international Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee, www.nispa.sk) was established in Slovakia. It brought together academics and practitioners in the field of public policy from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Its annual conferences were held in a different country every year, and assisted the development of specialist collaboration in the area in post-communist countries. Gradually, the organisation also began to attract support and participation from the Western academic and professional community, including NISPA and NASPAA, and nowadays the network benefits from the collaboration of a whole range of specialist teams looking at various issues connected with public policy.

It was at one of the NISPAcee conferences that led to my friendship and collaboration with Martin Potůček, from whom I found out about research being done by other academics such as Juraj Nemeč of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, László Vass and György Jenei in Budapest, Jochen Franzke in Potsdam, and Barbara Kudrycka in Poland. At the NISPAcee conferences, Katarína Staroňová and myself took part in a working group on politico-adminis-

trative relations led by Tony Verheijen, and this collaboration helped me get to know well-known figures in the public policy field such as Guy Peters and William Dunn (Pittsburgh University). Our work in NISPAcee also led to a number of publications looking at public policy issues in Central and Eastern Europe, such as politico-administrative relations, capacities to govern, health care delivery system or politicians and civil servants in coalition governments in Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>27</sup>

Another important factor that led to the institutionalisation of public policy as a field of academic study in Slovakia was the reform of public administration in Slovakia at the end of the 1990s. This prompted a lively public debate about both the whole system of public administration, the introduction of a regional level of local self-government and the introduction of new mechanisms for managing public affairs. On the government's initiative, various groups of experts gave their views on the problems of the various reforms, and also led public discussion about how policy is made in a multi-level political space. Political scientists, sociologists, economists and lawyers at various universities debated issues surrounding the reforms. The government received significant assistance from specialist think tanks in the non-governmental sector such as the Center for Social and Economic Analyses (M.E.S.A. 10), Slovak Governance Institute (SGI), Institute for Social and Economic Reforms (INEKO), Transparency International Slovakia (TIS), as well as the Open Society Fund (OSF), the education and training centre Academia Istropolitana Nova, and other third sector organisations. It was clear that democracy and an effective system of administration go hand in hand and need modern expertise in the management of public affairs. The new expert teams began to produce their first publications, and one of the most interesting for students was the *Manual for Creating Public Policy* produced by a team led by Miroslav Beblavý.<sup>28</sup>

2003 saw the launching of, the MATRA project 'Public Policy Making in Slovakia', which was funded by the Dutch government. It was designed to establish an educational infrastructure for training students in all aspects of modern public policy making. The project's results included a curriculum of general and specific modules for an M. A programme in Public Policy Making, led by

25 D. Horná, L. Malíková, (eds), (2001): *Democracy and the State based on the Rule of Law in the Context of the Development of Political Science*, FES, Bratislava.

26 L. Malíková, (2003), *Public Policy: Actors and Processes*, VUK, Bratislava.

27 T. Verheijen (ed.), (2001): *Politico-administrative Relations: Who Rules?*, NISPAcee, Bratislava.

M. Bryane, K. Rainer, W. Drechsler (eds), (2004): *Enhancing the Capacities to Govern: Challenges Facing the Central and Eastern European Countries*, NISPAcee, Bratislava. A. Rosenbaum, J. Nemeč, K. Tolo (eds), (2004): *Health Care Delivery Systems: Opportunities for Public Management Education in central and Eastern Europe*, NISPAcee, Bratislava.

G. Peters, T. Verheijen & L. Vass (eds), (2005): *Coalitions of The Unwilling? Politicians and Civil servants in Coalition Governments*, NISPAcee, Bratislava.

28 M. Beblavý, (ed), (2004), *Manual for Creating Public Policy*, SGI, Bratislava.

the managers of ROI, Dr. K. Becking and Dr. F. van den Berg. The Slovak partners were SGI (Andrej Salner, Miroslav Beblavý), the Institute for Public Administration (Stanislav Konečný) and the University task force for creating an MA programme, Professor Ig Snellen (Erasmus University), and from SGI, Emília Sičáková-Beblavá, Daniela Zemanovičová. At the same time, a new Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences was established at Comenius University in Bratislava, led by Professor Ladislav Kabát, and this included the introduction of a public policy programme in its strategic plan.

The MATRA programme was very effective in complementing the joint NASPAA-NISPAcee Technical Assistance Project 'Public Policy and Administration: Curricula Development Programme' which was initiated at Comenius University by myself and Professor Ladislav Kabát. Academic partners from NASPAA institutions, Prof. Arno Loessner (University of Delaware) and Prof. Guy Peters (Pittsburgh University), played a key role in the evaluation process of the programme. They also provided lectures and consultations on the issue of teaching techniques and provided resource material. Both programmes interacted well and set up a working group comprising both lecturers and practitioners which took part in a pilot project on Public Policy Making aimed at creating the curriculum for a Public Policy programme. The efforts of the working group culminated in the creation of a M. A. study programme in Public Policy in 2005 and the establishment of the Institute of Public Policy at the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at Comenius University, at which I am a director. One of the particular features of the Institute is its interdisciplinary nature, with a group of young lecturers who are fully qualified to look at public policy issues from the political, economic, sociological and legal perspectives. They are collaborating in the preparation and implementation of research projects looking into socio-economic and socio-political relationships, and the methods and quality of governance in post-transformation society. They are examining problems such as how the networks involved in policy creation and implementation function, analysing decision making processes in public policy, and looking for solutions to problems connected with the operation of institutions of public power and how they affect citizens. They also aim to produce M.A level graduates, who would be capable of critically analysing and helping to frame sectorised policies and reforms, as well as analysing cross-sectorised issues in public administration and the basic changes taking place in the management of society. In the two years of the Institute's existence, a number of projects have been successfully concluded. These include the LGI (Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative) project *Developing Innovative Teaching/Training in Public Policy and Administration*, which has led to the publication "*Ťažké rozhodnutia*" (*Difficult decisions*) (Katarína

Staroňová)<sup>29</sup>. For the first time, case studies of the management of self-government in Slovakia have been published. At the same time, the Open Society Foundation project, *Manuál tvorby verejnej politiky pre samosprávy* (*Manual for Public Policy Making for Self-governments*) was completed, leading to the publication of Emília Beblavá and Katarína Staroňová's '*Štyri princípy spravovania*' (*Four principles of management*)<sup>30</sup>. We are working on the APVV (Agency for Support of Research and Development) project, *Nástroje zvyšovania transparentnosti a posilnenia mechanizmov zodpovedania sa verejného sektoru*, (*Tools for increasing transparency and strengthening accountability mechanisms in the public sector*), led by Emília Sičáková-Beblavá.

Our publications have also been aided by the outcomes of the EU's Fifth Framework Programme (2003–2006). It was entitled 'Innovation in the Public Sector' (acronym: PUBLIN), and carried out by Ľudmila Malíková, Katarína Staroňová, Lucia Vagačová, and led in 2007 to the publication of Malíková's *Inovácie v sociálnych službách* (*Innovation in social service provision*)<sup>31</sup>. The research was both qualitative and quantitative, and looked at innovation in homes for senior citizens in Slovakia from various viewpoints of policy creation, decision making in the homes, and the needs of clients.

Apart from this, in June 2006, the Institute organised an international conference on *Quality of Governance in the New European Administrative Space*. Both the conference and the subsequent publication were generously sponsored by a number of donors, such as MATRA, Fulbright, and Transparency International Slovakia and published in 2006.<sup>32</sup>

Since September 2006, the Institute has also published the quarterly *Public Policy News*, which you can find on the Institute's website<sup>33</sup>. We are extremely pleased that this is being consulted by readers in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

The proof of vitality of public policy in the academic field in Slovakia is in the fact that public policy is studied also at regional universities, such as Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Martin Klus), University P. J. Šafarik in Košice (Daniel Klimovský and Lubica Kráľová).

29 K. Staroňová (ed.), (2007), *Training in Difficult Choices: 5 public policy case studies from Slovakia*, IPP FSES UK, Bratislava.

30 K. Staroňová (ed.), (2007), *Training in Difficult Choices: 5 public policy case studies from Slovakia*, IPP FSES UK, Bratislava.

31 K. Staroňová, E. Sičáková-Beblavá (eds), (2006), *Public Policy and Local Self-government: Four Principles of Management*, IPP FSES UK, Bratislava

32 Ľ. Malíková, (ed.), (2007),: *Innovation in Social Service*, VUK, Bratislava.

33 Ľ. Malíková, K. Staroňová, E. Beblavá, (eds), (2006), *Quality of Governance in the New European Administrative Space*, IPP, TIS, Bratislava.

From September 2007, our Institute of Public Policy at FSES UK in Bratislava offered a PhD. study program in European public policy. I hope that this doctoral form of study will open new opportunities for advancement and research for young talented specialists in the field of public policy, future experts in policy analysis of various areas.