

In search of sustainable public administration: What should, could, or must be done¹

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ABSTRACT

The main research question considered in the article is how to provide public administration that is sustainable, and capable of supporting its political management both in stable and in turbulent times. Within this framework, special attention is given to the performance of a state, the role of political management and public managers, challenges and trends in public service delivery, structural vs. incremental changes, and balancing the performance. In this article, we do not consider extensive public reforms per se; we focus on the sustainability of apparatus that supports the respective government and enables processes and projects of that kind. The methodology used is a combination of descriptive method, case study, and secondary analysis of empirical research conducted. Practical illustrations are provided on the case of Slovenia and in the context of the European Union. However, this article is more oriented towards future rather than the past. Therefore, the main contribution of this article is a presentation of a sustainable public administration model developed by the authoress, together with implications at organizational, national and international level. Some areas for further research are indicated.

Key Words: *sustainable public administration, sustainable development, institutional learning, quality public services, Slovenia*

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Introduction

The rationale behind searching for sustainable public administration derives or, at least, has been strengthened by the last economic crisis. Namely, the crisis placed a mirror in front of national states with respect to their public administrations. Lack of control mechanisms caused a crisis situation for most of them and came unexpectedly and with a full effect. Due to the complexity and pervasiveness of the crisis, state governments have received the role of crisis managers; many states initiated the process of redefining the role of government and its administration under the changed conditions of economic operations.

According to Pollitt (2009), three basic approaches of coping with the crisis and facing restricted budget sources for functioning of a state emerged: linear cutting, increasing efficiency, and centralized priorities setting. Especially in respect to the latter, the functions of the government and assortment of public services are to be re-examined in order to verify and redefine them. Redefining the role of government includes thorough re-thinking of functions that governments would like to have, as well as of those functions that government must have. Functions are various and can be classified into the following groups, according to the World Bank (2004): policy functions, co-ordination, control and monitoring the performance, service delivery, support functions, and regulatory functions. Administrative capacity is of a key importance in this respect.

In this article, we do not concentrate on public policies and the assortment of public services, but on the states' administrative capacity and the ability to have an apparatus that is efficient and capable of adoption when circumstances for their functioning change.

The administrative capacity of public administration in every state is a dynamic category. It varies in time, as the tasks of public administration vary, as do the levels of necessary knowledge and competencies of public employees. It is of a vital importance that the competence model at a state level includes tools to capture competences needed today and those to fit possible future needs. It is important for a state to have a public administration that corresponds to its needs, and that is following

principles and requirements for functioning of contemporary public administration including principles of political neutrality. If the balance in the system is ruined, or if it is not optimal according to current situation, then there are consequences on the ability of the public administration to effectively and efficiently support its political management. The state and the entire political management therefore need to have mechanisms that provide monitoring and ensuring administrative capacity of its administration for optimal implementation of its mission, and that is not pending on structure of current government.

The main research question considered in the article is how to provide public administration that is sustainable. We define sustainable public administration as public administration that is continuously capable of supporting its political management (Žurga, 2011a), both in stable and in turbulent times, as will be explained in this article.

Based on the literature review, we can identify the gap between 'what is desired' and 'how to get there' in respect to sustainable public administration. It is our intention in this article to provide and offer a model of sustainable public administration (SPA) that addresses different aspects that were more or less partially considered in scientific literature. In doing this, we take into account several different aspects, such as the maturity of public administrations, the tradition of the state, democracy and public administration, changes of the system, as well as daily modernisation and improvements efforts. The way in which the SPA model is built contributes to the integration of different aspects, and offers states to implement it or act in accordance to it at different starting points.

This article is organized as follows. In the next section, we will first offer a theoretical background; in this respect, we will define the scope of the article and will clarify basic terminology, and then present the literature review. Section 3 is on the methodology used, whereas section 4 will explore and present the efficiency of governments and their political management. In section 5, we present challenges and trends in quality public service delivery; special attention in this respect is being given to distinguishing changes of the system and changes within the system and balancing the performance.

In section 6, the sustainable public administration model (SPA) is being presented and argued. In section 7, we provide an illustration of the Sustainable public administration model on the case of Slovenia. After the discussion (section 8), I will derive conclusions, will present implications, and will indicate limitations of the research and areas for further investigation.

Theoretical background

Defining the scope

As previously mentioned, the need for sustainable public administration became more important after the economic crisis that occurred in 2008. Different questions were exposed, such as: *Were there any early warning signals? If yes, why were they ignored? If not, why they did not exist? Whose responsibility is this? Who should bear the burden of the crises? Why choose to cut public services, as taxpayers are entitled to have quality public services? And finally, one of the legitimate questions was also are governments adequately supported by their apparatus, i.e. public administration?*

While countries tried to adopt appropriate measures both in the short- and in the long-term, researchers and theorists concentrated their efforts in finding patterns that would contribute to understanding and overcoming the situation.

In this article, our main focus is sustainable public administration. It is not our intention to talk about reforms and their sustainability. Our focus is placed on how to build and maintain government apparatus to be able to support its political management in managing the state and providing necessary changes — we are addressing a system of public administration.

When speaking of sustainability in connection to public administration (PA), the debate goes into two main directions. First, we speak about inclusion of sustainability into decision making processes within public policies' definition, and holistic planning in society. And secondly, establishing and assuring sustainability in functioning of the government's apparatus that is supporting previously mentioned processes, both in administrative way and with their professional knowledge.

In this article, the focus of our consideration is on the apparatus of governments — the system of public administration itself.

In defining the term *sustainable development*, we lean on the definition of the World Commission from 1987 (the Brundtland report), i. e. development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” and, in this, incorporates economic, social and environmental concerns. The three pillars represent the bases for social responsibility.

When connecting the term *sustainable development* with public administration, several authors speak of decision making in different policy areas that should *meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. According to Fiorino (2010), sustainability involves three systems: environmental, economic and political/social systems. Fiorino argues that the challenge of governance and of public administration is to sustain each of these systems on its own while maintaining an appropriate balance among them. Khator (1998) talks about public governance for sustainable development. Several authors address different public policy areas in this respect such as land and spatial management and sustainable buildings processes (Enemark, 2001; Fowler & Rauch, 2006), transportation, agriculture and aquaculture (Corbin & Young, 1997), or e-government instruments to — according to Nica (2015) — “accelerate regulatory reform, and the capacity of empowered communities and cooperative governance for sustainable development.” For this, holistic planning in the society is of a vital importance (Leuenberger, 2006; Leuenberger & Wakin, 2007). Generally, the authors seek here for sustainability of policy areas — decisions as well the results — to preserve the nature and resources and to be economic, efficient and social responsible at the same time. Public administration is therefore basically seen as a tool for sustainable development (Nica, 2015). In addition to that, according to Ekstrom (2013), sustainability is becoming a vital public value. The authors Gutrie, Ball, & Farneti (2010) expose the need for public and not-for-profit organizations to report on their social, environmental or sustainability impacts. According to Moldavanova (2016), the *long term sustainability requires sustainable stewardship today, and organizational sustainability should be viewed not as an outcome but rather as a process and an ethic*.

Indeed, sustainable public administration is indispensable connected to social responsibility and the set of its basic principles: accountability, transparency, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholder interests, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behaviour and respect for human rights (ISO 26000:2010).

Before going more in depth, let us shortly explain the terminology that we use in respect to reforms and other changes that address public administrations.

If we first look to comprehensive dictionaries, the term “*reform*” may be explained as follows: “*Reform* consists of changes and improvements to a law, social system, or institution. A *reform* is an instance of such a change or improvement.” This is definition from the Collins dictionary, and we find similar definitions in other dictionaries, as for example of Merriam-Webster or Oxford dictionary. We do not have the intention to discuss the term itself, but to illustrate the fact that it denotes change and processes in this regard. In public administration, the term *reform* is commonly being used when speaking of changes in different policy areas, such as pension reform, labour market reform etc. The UNDP uses term ‘PAR’ — Public Administration Reform —, and writes that “Public Administration Reform can be very comprehensive, and includes process changes in areas such as organisational structures, decentralisation, personnel management, public finance, results-based management, regulatory reforms etc. It can also refer to targeted reforms such as the revision of the civil service statute.” It is worth mentioning that in the era of New Public Management (NPM), reforms denoted serious and extensive changes in almost all areas. After some decades, Hammerschmid et al. (2013, p. 4) state that “the tide of typical, ‘structural’ NPM reforms (such as privatization, contracting out or agencification) has by now subsided, replaced by reform trends more closely connected to a network-oriented understanding of government: transparent, open and/or e-government, as well as collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors.”

In this article, we try to avoid the term *reform* in respect to PA, and rather use more general term *changes*. In this context, we will talk about *smaller* and *bigger* changes, and the distinction is whether changes relate to changes *in* the system, within an organization etc., or to changes *of* the system in the sense of new (and/or additional)

organizations, new products (public services), etc. Generally, in the case of smaller changes we consider fine-tuning and adjustments of existing PA structure, values and modes of conduct, whereas bigger changes reflect major changes and sometimes even changes of a break-through nature; the latter may well be considered structural changes.

Literature review

The focus of investigation in this article is public administration that is sustainable. In this, we will use the term *sustainable public administration* to denote PA that is continuously capable of supporting its political management (Žurga, 2011a). The term *sustainable public administration* itself was discussed on a bigger scale in time after last economic crises occurred. Besides our definition, authors like Pollitt (2009), Parrado and Löffler (2009) all based the definition of sustainable public administration on the definition of sustainable development from the Brundtland report (WCED, 1987).

At the time of the last economic crisis, national states were faced with seriously scarced resources for their own functioning, which included not only the provision of public services, but also the functioning of their respective apparatus. Institutional configuration may have played a role in shaping the different discretionary fiscal policies adopted by governments (Duma, 2015). Due to functioning in completely different conditions, public management was also facing serious pressures for reducing the amount of public spending and borrowing as well as reducing the amount of public services. One of the first researchers that tried to classify national responses to restricted economic situation for functioning of their respective public administrations was C. Pollitt. In his work entitled 'Public management reform during financial austerity,' Pollitt (2009) reported the first reactions of governments when coping with crisis and facing restricted budget sources: linear cutting of budgetary funds, increasing efficiency, and centralized priorities setting. In this work, Pollitt also indicated what each of the three approaches meant for the governments and their intentions to more or less seriously, address changed conditions of functioning.

For understanding the responses of governments in reality, it is important to mention two studies that were performed upon the same subject, one just before the crises

emerged, in 2008 (Žurga, 2008), and another one in 2010 (Hidalgo, 2010). The 2008 study was exploring the contribution of national public administrations to the realization of the Lisbon Strategy (LS) goals and possible connections between actions taken and results achieved. The PA areas and change (reform) initiatives reported by the members states as relevant for supporting national performance were: the reduction of administrative burdens (RAB), better regulations (BR), regulatory impact assessment (RIA), e-government, integrated back office functions, sharing resources, public administration reform (PAR), quality management (QM), structures, R&D, innovation (for a recent R&D study see Păcurar & Ivanov, 2016). Three types of main PA focus were identified in the sense how things were getting done: RAB & BR dominant focus, e-government dominant focus, and PAR /QM / specific sector/policy dominant focus (Žurga, 2008).

The update of the study on the public administrations' contribution to the Lisbon Strategy was performed in 2010, after the crisis emerged. It showed that the most significant attention of the EU member states' National action programmes were changed towards: improving the efficiency and productivity of PA, rationalization of public expenditure and the reduction of time spent in administrative procedures for a better service to citizens and enterprises; incorporating the regulatory reform through regulatory impact assessment and better regulation; reducing the administrative burdens in procedures to enterprises and citizens to improve the work and business environment; strengthening competitiveness; implementing institutional changes to restructuring public sector reducing/merging the number of administrative units or levels, aimed at finding synergies and creating a new and more efficient structure, by means of the removal of overlapping functions; boosting and enabling the innovation as a main support for increasing the productivity in all the economic sectors; enhancing transparency and accountability, opening the information to the citizens in order to explain public actions, and to submit public performance to the evaluation by interested actors (Hidalgo, 2010).

If we concentrate on improving public administrations, Pollitt and Bouckaert (Radu, 2015p. 181-182) stated in 2011 that four major subjects of reforms were financial management, human resource management, organizational structures, and

performance management. On the other hand, the recent COCOPS study stated that “despite the salience of public administrations reforms in Europe, there is surprisingly little systematic research identifying how and where public sector reforms have been implemented, and with what outcomes” (Hammerschmid, et. al., 2016, p. 4).

It is a fact that states responded to crisis differently, which was not only a reflection of capability of their actual governments. Responses depended very much on the democracy’s level of maturity, on the state’s political management and on the development stage of their respective PAs. In that respect, Radu (2015) exposed a different situation in former communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe.

A comprehensive study was performed for the European Commission in 2012, with the title *Excellence in public administration for competitiveness in EU Member States*. According to this study, the tools that have major impacts on the relationship between competitiveness and public-sector excellence are most prominently electronic government, human resources management, performance orientation, service orientation and the institutional re-organisation of administration (Pitlik et al., 2012).

Some countries, especially those with a longer tradition and better economic performance, are more oriented towards the fine-tuning of their public administrations and strengthening the quality and efficiency of their functioning. Many studies are therefore connected with quality management aspects, and search for sustainable public administration in the framework of improving the PA system on incremental bases (Parrado and Löffler, 2009; Žurga, 2011b; studies of the European Institute of Public Administration - EIPA). The question on how quality management in PA, and quality public administration can contribute to national competitiveness became central research, and at the same time a very practical question to all EU member states and relevant international organizations. We also have to emphasize the fact that the EU member states seek to respond to these kinds of challenges in the context of the Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010) strategy as a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and their contribution in this regard. The task of every member state is to incorporate all EU umbrella objectives in its development plans and adopt appropriate measures (Žurga, 2011c).

If we resume the literature review connected to sustainable public administration — public administration that is sustainable, and capable of supporting its political management both in stable and in turbulent times —, we can see that different authors share a common perception of the crisis' impact on public administrations; however, they do not offer a unique answer on how to overcome the situation. It is our intention to offer a sustainable public administration model (SPA) as an answer, and to contribute to further debates and researches in the area.

Methodology

The research conducted is a combination of descriptive method, secondary analysis of empirical researches and documents. Some illustrations are given on a case of Slovenia and in a context of the European Union (EU).

The secondary analysis was primarily oriented on following previous researches, analysis and documents:

- Performance of governments in international context: different competitiveness indices were explored here, as well as their structure defining government performance, namely:
 - Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) 2016, World Economic Forum;
 - The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016, World Economic Forum (Schwab);
 - The 2016 IMD World competitiveness scoreboard, Institute of Management Development;
- Researches and international comparisons of governments and their position in respect to different performance indicators and/or usage of management tools;
 - Excellence in public administration for competitiveness in EU Member States, 2012 (Pitlik et al.);
 - Evaluation of Public Administrations' Added Value to the Lisbon Strategy Goals, 2008 (Žurga);
 - Evaluation of Public Administrations' Added Value to the Lisbon Strategy Goals, Update 2010 (Hidalgo);
 - Public administration scoreboard, 2015, European Commission;

- Public Administration Reforms in Europe: The view from the top, 2016 (Hammerschmid et al.);
- Some researches, documents, recommendations, etc. of international actors such as World Bank, European Commission, or OECD, namely:
 - Innovative Workplaces: Making Better Use of Skills within Organisations, 2010, OECD;
 - The OECD Innovation Strategy: Getting a Head Start on Tomorrow, 2010, OECD;
 - Economic Surveys. Slovenia. 2015, OECD;
- Functional analysis in Slovene public sector, from November 2015.

For the analysis, the grounded theory methodology was used. The sources of analysis that are mentioned above were thoroughly considered. First, identification of categories of meaning from the source documents was done, and integration and clustering was performed afterwards. Special attention was given to recognizing relationships between them, leading to the development of the sustainable public administration model. The analytical process itself included the definition of basic key words, their interpretation and grouping. Sources of analysis were explored thoroughly as the key words were not mutually exclusive. In this process, we leaned on scientifically proven causalities and concepts, by distinguished authors.

Let us mention two limitations of this research. Firstly, in this article, our focus is on the sustainability of public administrations. We do not deal with private sector organizations or organizations that strive to make profit. Therefore, it is not our intention to compare business models in the public and private sector, although the concept of sustainability is universal, and addresses all of them. Secondly, no additional data at primary level was gathered for more in-depth insight into this topic. This can be considered as a limitation in the sense of making comparisons and/or parallels, but not to conclusions and findings in general. However, we address this in the concluding section, when indicating areas for further investigation.

Performance of a state and the role of political management

The quality of a state's political management is being measured in the international context, through different macroeconomic indicators, and by the state's position on the world competitiveness ranking lists. Importance of roles and activities of governments and their administrations is being reflected in different competitiveness indices, where their compound structures suggest the importance of individual aspects of government activities to the competitiveness of national economy. In the sustainable competitiveness framework (Schwab, 2016), the two areas of sustainability — social and environmental — are treated as independent adjustments to each country's performance in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI). As both two areas of sustainability are affected by, and are also results of, governmental policies at a national level, it is evident that the role of political management is important not only in the context of the current performance of a state, but also in the context of sustainability. Some research and theoretical work in this respect was already mentioned within the literature review (Gutrie, Ball, & Farneti, 2010; Fiorino, 2010).

By the term 'political management' we understand those structures or entities of a state that deal with mastering a state and directing its development as formal actors at power, i. e. government, parliament, and political parties.³ From the aspect of a state, its citizens and economy, the main task of political management is to lead and manage a state in a manner that assures its long-term development that results in competitiveness of its national economy globally, and development of society that assures the highest quality of life and work for all (Žurga, 2011a).

However, assuring this kind of development is only possible if there is a broad consensus in the society about main developmental goals of a state, clear vision, and cooperation and coordination first at defining and then at implementation of the appropriate developmental projects — those that mobilize resources of a state in a manner that synergy through cooperation is achieved. This is of vital importance, as resources are limited — and by resources we do not mean only finance and human potential, but time as well. In fact, the efficient use of time and set of appropriate

³ In the article, we only consider political management at the state level; other levels of political management (regional, local, supranational) are not a matter of this article.

development projects is a combination that can drive a state into improved competitiveness and higher effectiveness.

We present here two competitiveness indices: the IMD competitiveness index, and the World Economic Forum global competitiveness index. They are both compound indices that also include aspects of government efficiency.

The IMD competitiveness index calculation includes four main criteria, each criterion has five sub-criteria, and each of the twenty sub-criteria is further composed of a definite number of indicators. The four main criteria are: Economic operations (1), Government efficiency (2), Economy efficiency (3) and Infrastructure (4).

The World Economic Forum global competitiveness index is composed of 12 pillars with 114 indicators. The pillars are designed to explain the orientation of the national economy, through three possible defined development stages: factor driven, efficiency driven and innovation driven. The 12 pillars are: Institutions (1), Infrastructure (2), Macroeconomic environment (3), Health and primary education (4), Higher education and training (5), Goods market efficiency (6), Labour market efficiency (7), Financial market development (8), Technological readiness (9), Market size (10), Business sophistication (11) and Innovation (12).

In the context of comparing performance of the states, it is worth mentioning the comprehensive study that was performed for the European Commission in 2012, entitled *Excellence in public administration for competitiveness in EU Member States*. The study aimed to derive a framework that can be used to assess 'excellence in public administration' — conceived as a well-functioning, efficient and modern administration — with respect to competitiveness (Pitlik et al., 2012). Namely, according to the study, the tools that have major impacts most prominently on the relationship between competitiveness and public-sector excellence are (1) electronic government, (2) human resources management, (3) performance orientation, (4) service orientation and (5) the institutional re-organisation of administration. The study defines an empirical framework to assess elements of public administrations which appear to be the most important for a business-friendly environment. The seven elements are:

General governance (A), Tools for administrative modernisation (B), Corruption and fraud (C), Starting a business and licensing (D), Public procurement (E), Tax compliance and tax administration (F), and Efficiency of civil justice (G), among them the first three (A, B and C) having “overarching influences that affect the quality of public administration and its relation to the business environment.”

Challenges and trends in quality public service delivery

Despite the crisis and scarce resources, demands for quality public services remain, and these demands are not only legitimate, but also represent the driving force for better public governance.

Namely, due to economic crisis and functioning in changed (and in some cases completely different) conditions, public management is now facing serious pressures for reducing the amount of public spending and borrowing, as well as reducing the amount of public services — this is also closely connected to their quality. Additionally, due to financial and economic crises, new social problems and social exclusion, a low level of trust in politicians and public institutions occurred. The demands are numerous and require decisive action from the respective governments and public management. The key words are sustainable development, sustainable quality and sustainable public administrations.

Structural changes vs. incremental changes

Balancing the work of organizations and institutions in public administration and the public sector alone is not enough; we need structural changes, something that requires new policies and new forms of public management (Metcalf, 2010; Roberts, 2010). Governments can play a proactive role in recognizing the turbulence at its early stages and in developing competency in supervising structural changes (Pollitt, 2009).

From the standpoint of citizens as customers of the administration, stability and predictability of the functioning of state institutions in conformity with the rule of law and the right to good administration is to be assured, even in times of crisis and structural changes (for a recent, interesting theory of rule of law see Lane, 2016). This is also

stipulated in the Treaty of Lisbon. It is up to the state to ensure the continuous functioning of its institutions for its users (Parrado and Löffler, 2009) — citizens and business entities —, and to simultaneously plan and realize structural changes in such a way that it will ensure the desired long-term effects.

There are two basic types of changes in public management: incremental and structural (Metcalf, 2010; ISO 9004:2009). Incremental changes are changes within the system, while structural changes are changes of the system. Incremental changes do not alter existing structures and happen continuously and within existing frameworks. These changes are a series of continuous and gradual steps to bring functioning into balance. Incremental changes are about constantly improving performance, which is implemented by organizations with established quality management (QM) systems on a daily basis (ISO 9004:2009; Thijs & Staes, 2005).

On the other hand, structural changes are markers of something inconsistent, sudden and unexpected, and bring about extensive reorganization. Structural changes cannot be realized in existing managerial frameworks, since they include altering the existing managerial frameworks. Structural changes are linked to high level of risk-taking: because of a potentially inadequate structural change for a systemic problem that is being addressed, the risk of turbulence is high, as is the risk that the change will not be properly managed (Metcalf, 2010).

The current economic situation requires both types of changes, as well as systems, organizations and individuals who are qualified to implement both types of changes.

New roles and responsibilities of public administrations and public managers

New (types of) problems require new solutions (Metcalf, 2010; Žurga, 2011c). The logic consequence is that changed conditions demand not only changes in functioning of public administrations, but also public managers of a new type.

It is a challenge for a public administration system to effectively adapt to changed demands, especially in conditions of low administrative capacity. Those to have to master the operations of public administration organizations are the heads and managers of these organisations. They as well must have mechanisms for mastering the changes in place and have to endeavour continuously to increase the quality of their activities and services. They have to be aware that their responsibility of a public manager outreaches their responsibility in the times of public administration and that they require managerial knowledge (Demmke, 2004). They need to adopt to new requirements in a decisive and proactive way.

The organisation that they are heading is a business system, which requires agreements on activities and suitable allocation of resources. They have to follow the purpose of their activities, including not only the assurance of public services, but also the care for further development of the system that they are heading. They have to be proactive and serve as an example for their co-workers. Only that way will they be able to motivate and construct a suitable atmosphere, supportive of implementation of changes and continuous improvements. The most important characteristic of modern business systems is their dynamics. The organizational structure has to pursue the objectives of the organization. If the goals change, the structure should adapt accordingly, otherwise it could impede reaching the new objectives and could turn into an obstacle. Objectives are not set for eternity, but rather change with time.

Already during the period of defining the organization's objectives, the ways for measuring their achievement have to be defined (Dooren, Bouckaert & Halligan, 2010). The system of measuring holds a significant value as it defines the objectives' importance — they are important if they are measured. On the other hand, such a system has a powerful impact on the behaviour/activities of the employees or those included in the measurements, who engage in those areas that are being measured and 'bring points' as well as drop or do not carry out the activities that are not measured. The system of measurement can therefore either help or hinder, and is undoubtedly linked to the system of values within an organisation. Measuring can influence what is measured and can transform that into a value and is as such, inseparably linked with

the integrity of civil servants and the responsibility of public managers to guarantee that integrity (Demmke, 2004; Dooren, Bouckaert & Halligan, 2010).

Ethical behaviour cannot be guaranteed solely through individual instruments or partial changes. Integrity and ethical behaviour also cannot be achieved overnight, but rather need to be created and renovated. As values change through time, taking care of the integrity has to be a permanent task. If public managers fail to recognize the importance of developing values, their stakeholders will most likely lose the trust in them.

Finally, public managers have to be aware that they require adequate knowledge in order to perform their tasks (Žurga, 2011b). Knowledge, necessary for solving new problems and challenges, is becoming increasingly more interdisciplinary. Problems also differ among themselves, requiring suitable methodological knowledge as the chosen method depends on the problem and not vice versa. An increasing number of issues cannot be solved with the same level of knowledge on which they were created. Therefore, personal development of public administration managers is of key importance.

A sustainable public administration model

The framework for defining the sustainability of public administrations includes and requires a clear definition of the scope of their operations and responsibility for the results, establishing culture for innovation and continuous improvement, and establishing public administration organizations as learning organizations. The concept of learning organizations (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Daft, 1995) evolved over past decades and is now incorporated in managerial models that are well used in public administration as well (Thijs & Saes, 2005; Pitlik et al., 2012).

The right balance between changes at the system level and at the organizational level is to be defined — in this respect, innovation is seen as an important source for both types of changes. Not every innovation requires structural changes at the system level;

it may require changes at organizational level (break-through projects) or it addresses fine-tuning according to the incremental method (Žurga, 2011a).

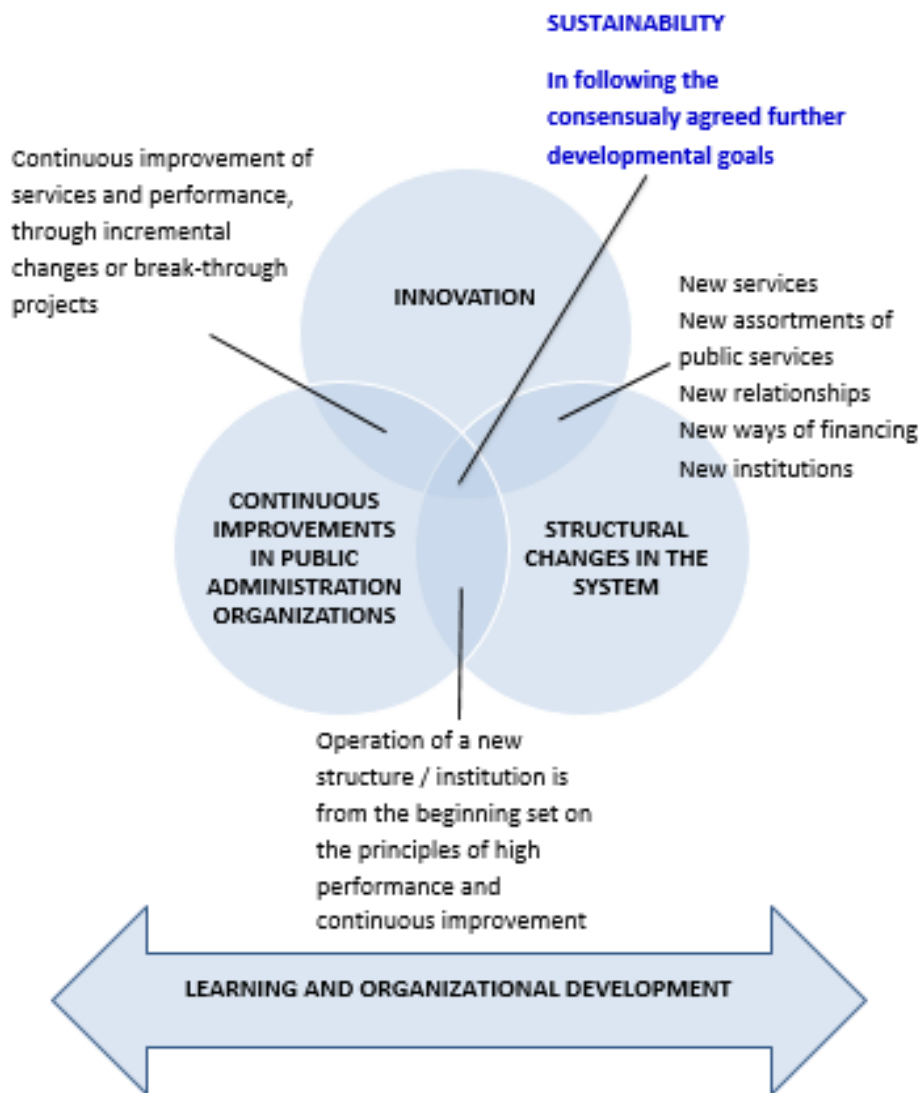
Based on the research conducted and taking into consideration contemporary challenges that require not only new approaches and solutions in providing public services, but also highly productive and results-oriented functioning, the basic elements of sustainable public administration can be defined as *innovation, continuous improvement at organizational level, and structural changes at system level*. All three elements were derived as a result of the grounded theory methodology used, however do have their bases also in contemporary efforts and findings of theorists and researchers, as well as of major international organizations that direct development of managerial frameworks in practice.

Innovation in the sense of searching for and implementation of new or significantly improved ways of public goods and services provision has to become a value, and the culture of innovation needs to be incorporated into the functioning of public administration system at all levels. This consequently means that innovation is everyone's matter, and that the public administration system needs to become an environment that stimulates innovation. It is important that this kind of system is institutionalized — innovation should not be understood as a disturbance, but as a fundamental guideline. At this point, we can mention the work of Hammerschmid et al, (2013) — that substantiates the importance of innovation —, as well as some studies of the OECD (2011a; 2011b).

Continuous improvement in public administration organizations is quite well developed in the EU member states (Thijs & Staes, 2005; Pitlik et al., 2012). Although the tradition is different in this area, it is beyond any doubt that some quality management tools, such as the Common Assessment Framework CAF, customer satisfaction management or benchmarking, bench learning and exchange of good practices, are being broadly utilised and deployed (Žurga, 2011b). However, it still requires additional mechanisms to institutionalize the continuous improvement as a

common and usual way of functioning in PA and not as an exception. Basic principles in this respect are connected to PA organizations with high performance, and that are well led, are strategic, are accountable, oriented into results, to their customers and citizens, involve their employees and stakeholders, are innovative, constantly improve, effectively use information and knowledge, and act and develop as learning organizations (Hill, 2008; Parrado and Löffler, 2009). Responsibility for results is personalized at all levels, and the organization is achieving its goals and effectively uses the available resources.

Figure 4: Sustainable public administration model



Source: the author's own calculations

Structural changes in the system are meant as those kind or changes in PA system (and broader, in the public sector) that are to be implemented when (new) problems require radically new solutions. Need for these kinds of changes often derive from performance comparisons at international level (Metcalf, 2010; Pitlik et al., 2012; Schwab; 2012, 2016). This requires established mechanisms of constant checking the performance in international context, and search for solutions through democratic dialogue between all relevant stakeholders in which political management of a state bears important role.

All three elements of the model, *Innovation*, *Continuous improvement in PA organisations* and *Structural changes in the system*, are highly interrelated. The overlapping section between the three joint sections (dark in the figure) is defined as **sustainability** in following the consensually agreed further developmental goals of the state. It means that the sustainability of the public administration system is being provided through clearly determined joint plans and rules of conduct, is constantly being checked, and (corrective) actions and measures are being adopted based on the measured results of the checks performed and put on the social responsibility bases with its core principles (ISO 26000:2010) and emphasized ethical behaviour (Moldavanova, 2016). As a feedback loop, constant learning and organizational development is incorporated in the model aiming in ensuring constant improving of the individual elements of the system of public administration as well as of the system as a whole.

Illustration of the Sustainable public administration model on the case of Slovenia

For the purpose of this article, the necessity of a strategic approach is illustrated on the case of Slovenia. As a response to the crisis, Slovenia adopted several measures — both long-term, and short-term measures. However, from today's point of view, most of them seem to be of a more short-term nature, as can be argued by several indicators of a state's performance. However, a strong point with a certain tradition represent quality management in the Slovene public administration, and a culture of continuous improvements at — at least — organizational level.

The strategic context of Slovene public administration development

The development of the Slovene public administration was included in strategic documents since early stages.

In April 2015, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Public Administration Development Strategy 2015–2020. The main strategic goals were stated as: Efficient organization; Efficient use of resources; Improving legislative environment; Open and transparent operation with zero tolerance to integrity violation in the public sector; Quality management systems in public administration; Effective informatics, increased use of e-services and interoperability of information solutions.

The vision of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia as stated in the strategy “is to organise modern public administration which will observe the principles and values of: *law and the rule of law; professionalism; participation; transparency, integrity and corruption prevention; responsiveness and user-orientation; consensus-orientation and integration; fairness and integration; innovation, success and efficient use of resources; responsibility*; as the basis for measures and indicators of effectiveness, observation of public interest, satisfaction of citizens, companies and other stakeholders with which it will achieve above-average results among EU Member States regarding high-quality service provision” (Ministry of public administration, 2015a).

Functional analysis in the Slovene public sector

In the same year, 2015, a thorough functional analysis⁴ was conducted, and brought to light several problems in the manner of the functioning of Slovene public administration, problems which were already known; however, they were not argued with quantified data and calculations. The main focus of the analysis was to get deep insight into differences in efficiency between different public-sector organizations. In this respect, a methodology with a set of indicators was developed, and support processes were thoroughly analysed. An analysis of activities for 19.543

⁴ Functional analysis of public sector entities, Ministry of public administration, November 2015.

FTE⁵ public employees and 1.549 outsourced employees, and an analysis of efficiency indicators for 240 public sector organizations were performed⁶ (Ministry of public administration, 2015b).

Within the activity analysis, 26 activities were defined and analysed. For public sector organizations that were included in the analysis, 58 % of their time was allocated to 6 core activities, and 42 % of time to 20 support activities. In calculating different indicators, the focus was on support activities mainly in the areas of accounting, finance, personnel, IT, administration, reporting, leadership, cleaning and maintenance.

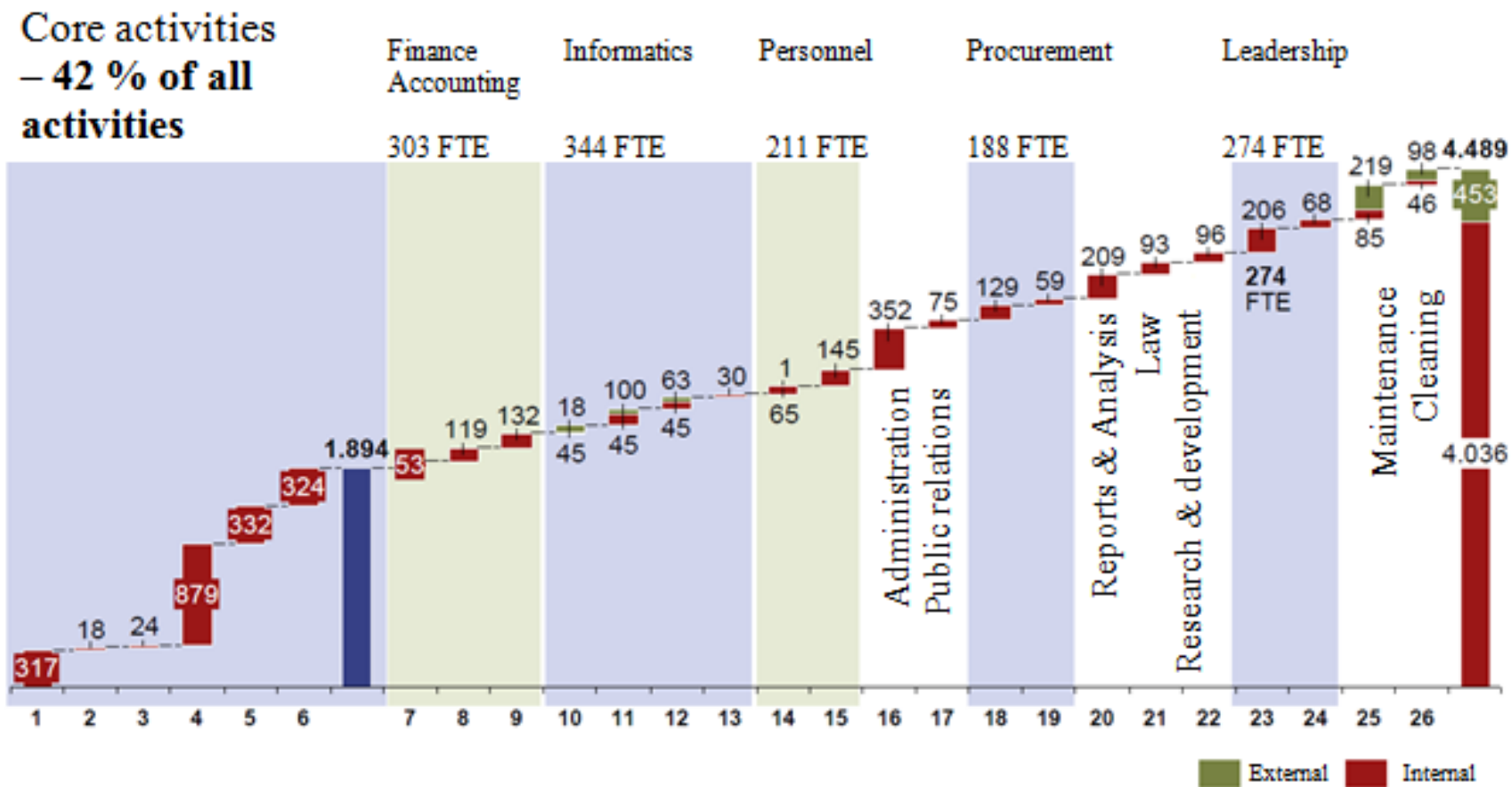
However, there are differences between types of public administration organizations. As in this article, we concentrate more on public administration rather than on the whole public sector, and we expose the results of functional analysis for the ministries. Only 42 % of their time is allocated to their core business and 58 % of the time to support activities (see Figure 2). Lower time allocation for core business than ministries only have public funds (41 %) and the best ratio with 80 % time dedicated to core business has the Surveying and Mapping Authority.

Within the functional analysis, seven areas for possible optimization were clearly pointed out: optimization of support functions, administrative processes, reporting, geographic coverage of public administration territorial units, ratio between inside and outsourced execution of support functions, unification of labour costs for activities within public administration organizations of a same type. Impacts for these measures are illustrated in Figure 3.

⁵ Full time employee.

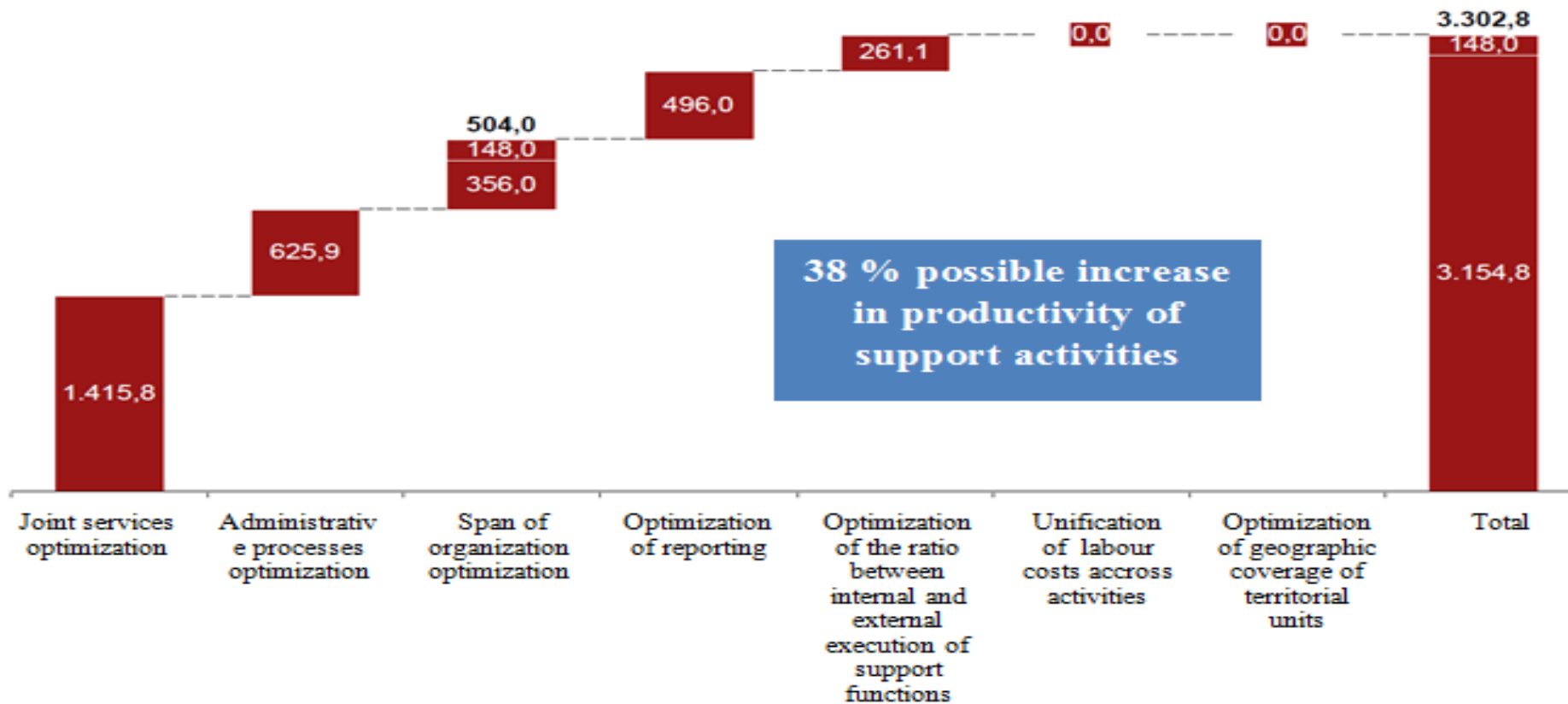
⁶ For the purposes of the analysis, following clusters / types of public administration organizations were defined: government offices, ministries, bodies within ministries (17, without inspectorate bodies, Financial administration and the Surveying and mapping authority that were considered as three separate entities under consideration; also police- and army forces were excluded), public institutes (Pension and Disability Insurance Institute, Employment Service and National Education Institute), public agencies (14 public agencies founded by the state), public funds (9 public funds founded by the state), administrative units (all 58), social work centres (all 62), and other entities (38 institutes and other public entities).

Figure 5: Structure of activities – ministries



Source: Functional analysis, 2015, p. 28

Figure 6: Impact of identified measures, in FTE, for all 240 organizations



Source: Functional analysis, 2015, p. 27

Quality management in the Slovene public administration

Activities in the area of quality and business excellence in the Slovene public administration is characterized by the combination of 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches.

The 'top down' approach is being used in particular in the activities of the ministry responsible for public administration and guidance of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. It is aimed at (co)-preparation of different strategic and development documents relating to the quality of performance of Slovene administration, development of joint basis, methodological tools and frameworks, as well as the institutionalization of good practices and quality standards into the legislation.

The 'bottom up' approach denotes activities in the introduction of systems that will bring quality into individual bodies/organizations of public administration. Foremost, it relates to the introduction of quality management systems according to ISO 9000 standards, or according to principles of business excellence, for example CAF and EFQM. In the environments where more managerial and organizational knowledge is present, other organizational models are used as well.

The public administration organizations follow, in general, the strategy of 'incremental adjustment' — this means that the changes in an organization are introduced according to the step-by-step method. This strategy follows a rational approach, is based on a continuity and continuous adjustment of basic competences and processes of the organization. It supports total quality management for the improvement of such an organization. The main characteristics and advantages of this strategy are: conformity of the organizational structure with its basic competences, adjustment of activities to the cultural norms of the organization, implementation of corrections and adjustment of deviations in regard to the accepted standards, and incessant search for opportunities to improve, be it within the organization or not.

It is important to mention that intensive development in the area of quality in Slovene public administration was observed especially from the year 1999, when the Quality

Committee was established at the ministry in charge for public administration. The main purpose of its activity was defined as an efficient, citizen friendly, recognizable and responsible public administration. Within this, the Quality Committee focused on the following goals: to increase effectiveness and efficiency, to increase the satisfaction of customers and employees, to control costs, to improve transparency of operations, to raise image and visibility, and to gain ISO quality certificate for administrative units.

The main activities and results achieved were in the areas of implementation of Common assessment framework (CAF) and principles of excellence, sharing good practices and quality conferences, networking and comparative learning, introducing common methodological tools such as measuring customer satisfaction etc.

In the year 2015, the aforementioned *Public administration development strategy 2015-2020* was adopted. In respect to the objective of introducing a comprehensive quality management system in public administration, the three sub-objectives are defined as:

- (1) Strengthening support and awareness of employees about the importance of quality as a value in public administration;
- (2) Strengthening the quality management system development based on the CAF model and exchange of good practices at all public administration levels:
 - Setting legal bases for establishing quality management system and performance assessments of public administration organisations at a system level, based on the CAF model;
 - Regular internal audits / self-assessments of quality management system (CAF) in public administration at all levels and improved review on quality management system implementation in state administration;
 - External audits of quality management system with improvements action plan — pilot implementation in 5 administrative bodies with 25 external assessors;
 - Knowledge spreading and promotion, through quality conferences, quality control, performance review and responsibility in respect to resources;

- (3) Strengthening the quality management system through implementation of application for measuring key goals and performance indicators.

Facts and figures on government efficiency, administrative capacity and need for structural changes

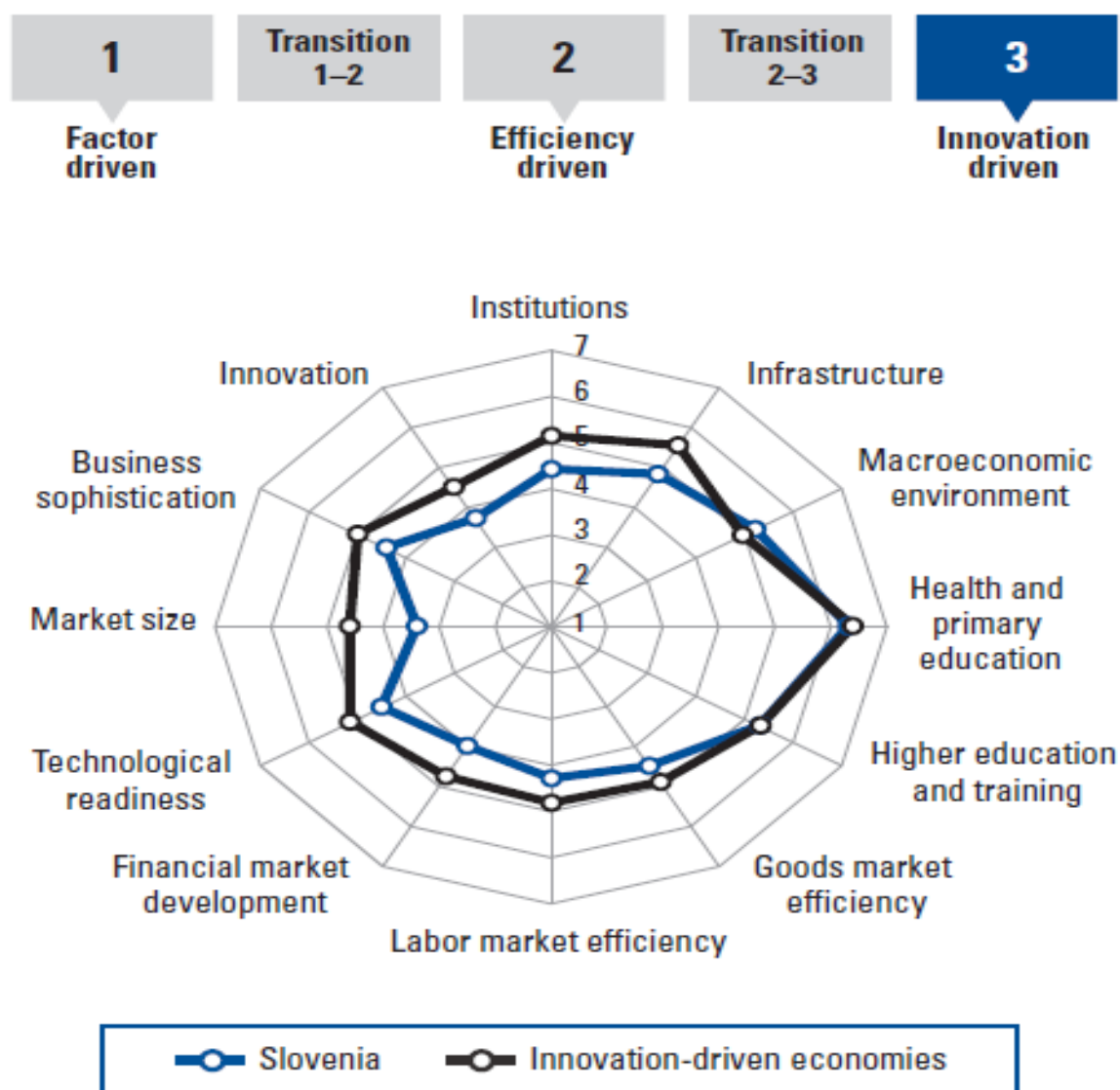
The next two figures show the stages of 12 pillars of the WEF's competitiveness index for Slovenia, for the years 2015 – 2016 and 2010 – 2011.

Figure 7: WEF's country profile – Slovenia, 2015-2016



Source: Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016 (2016: 324)

Figure 8: WEF's country profile – Slovenia, 2010-2011



Source: Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011 (2010: 300).

With respect to the need for structural changes, Slovenia is also receiving recommendations from international entities. Some of the latest recommendations will be presented next.

Table 1: The Council's recommendations for Slovenia in 2016 and 2017

The Council recommends that Slovenia take action in 2016 and 2017 to:
1. Following the correction of the excessive deficit, achieve an annual fiscal adjustment of 0.6 % of GDP towards the medium-term budgetary objective in 2016 and in 2017. Set a medium-term budgetary objective that respects the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact. Strengthen the fiscal framework by appointing an independent fiscal council and amending the Public Finance Act. Complete and implement the reform of the long-term care and healthcare systems, making them more cost-efficient to ensure long-term sustainability of accessible and quality care. By the end of 2017, adopt the necessary measures to ensure the long-term sustainability and adequacy of the pension system.
2. In consultation with social partners, increase the employability of low-skilled and older workers, including through targeted lifelong learning and activation measures.
3. Improve the financing conditions for creditworthy business, including by facilitating durable resolution of non-performing loans and access to alternative financing sources. Ensure the proper implementation of the bank asset management company strategy.
4. Take measures to modernise public administration and reduce the administrative burden on business. Improve the governance and the performance of state-owned enterprises.

Source: Council's recommendations on the 2016 national reform programme of Slovenia and delivering a Council opinion on the 2016 stability programme of Slovenia, 2016, p. 15.

In an economic survey for Slovenia performed in 2015, the OECD gave the following key recommendations:

Table 2: OECD's recommendations for Slovenia in 2015

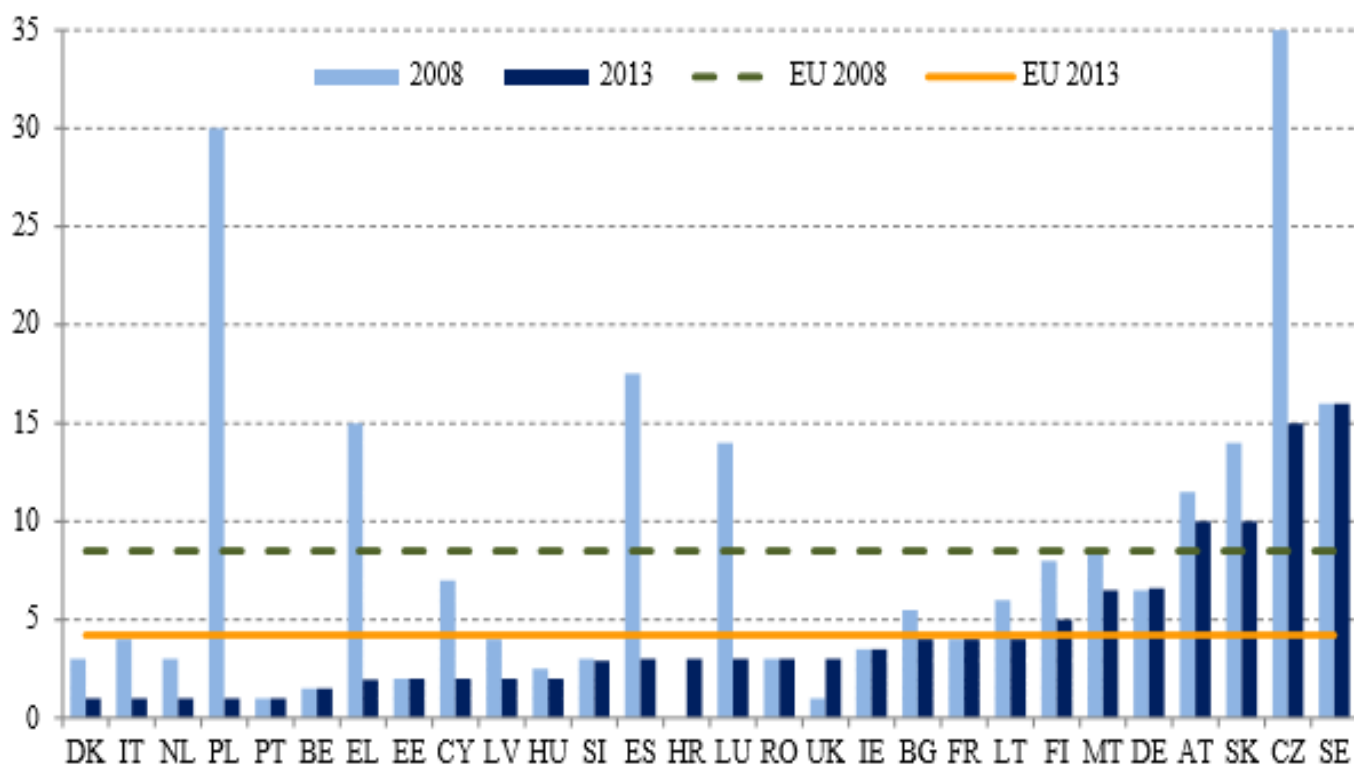
OECD's key recommendations for Slovenia are:
Continuing the structural reform <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus fiscal consolidation on structural measures to increase cost efficiency in education, public administration and local government.• Enhance the leading role of the Bank Asset Management Company to ensure swift restructuring of companies and effective liquidation of assets.• Continue privatizing state-owned enterprises and do not hold controlling interests in firms operating in competitive markets.
Strengthening the banking and corporate sectors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the most important firms to be restructured, ensure that all assets in a company group are transferred to the Bank Asset Management Company.• Bank Asset Management Company should maintain its independence and ability to attract highly professional staff, while adhering to the highest standards of corporate governance and transparency.• Monitor the implementation of the new insolvency regulation and improve institutional capacity by training judges and insolvency administrators. Make out-of-court restructuring faster and more attractive.
Stabilising debt and tackling pressures from population ageing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adopt a fiscal rule with a credible and transparent expenditure rule and ensure that an independent and effective fiscal council is charged with assessing adherence.• Increase the statutory and minimum pension ages and link them explicitly to life expectancy. Calculate pension rights over lifetime contributions.• Thoroughly reform the health sector to improve efficiency, including of organizational and governance structures and public procurement.
Boosting jobs and growth

- Increase resources for active labour market policies and better target assistance to the long-term unemployed and the low-skilled, based on evaluation of individual programmes.
- Introduce the ‘silence is consent’ rule for issuing licences required to open up a business and make obtaining construction permits and registering property faster.
- Implement the government's unified innovation policy and monitor its progress. Improve collaborative links between major stakeholders of innovation policy.

Source: OECD Economic Surveys, Slovenia, 2015, p. 3

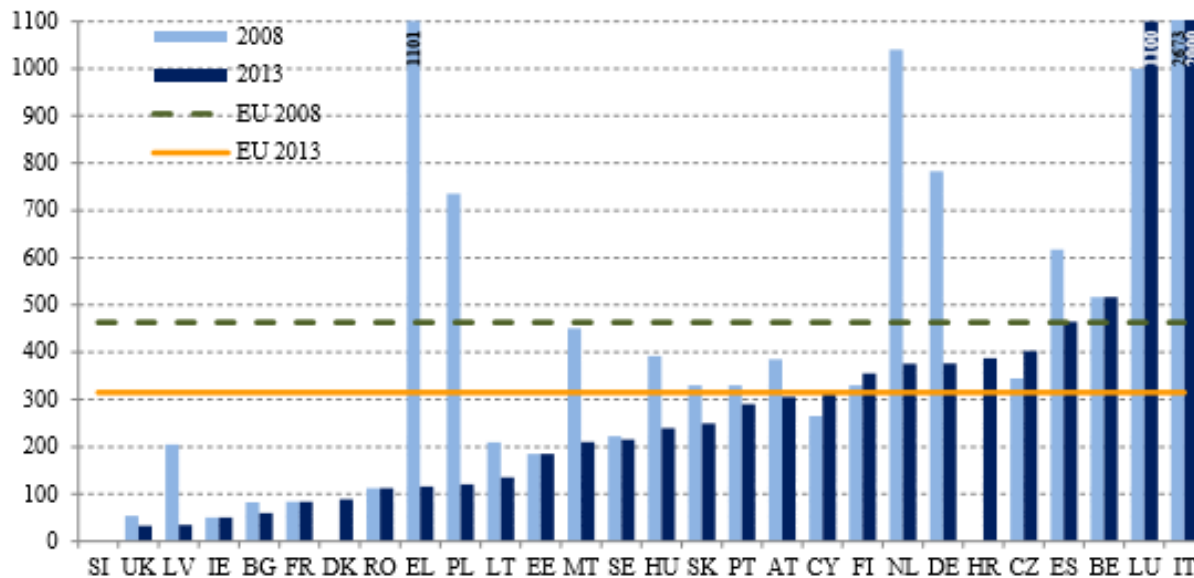
Although Slovenia received some recommendation in respect to the business environment, it is important to mention that conditions for starting a business in Slovenia are among the best in the EU. The next two figures analyse starting business in Slovenia with respect to time and costs. Starting a business in Slovenia is free of charge and takes up to three days.

Figure 9: Time required to start a company (in days)



Source: Public administration scoreboard, p. 67

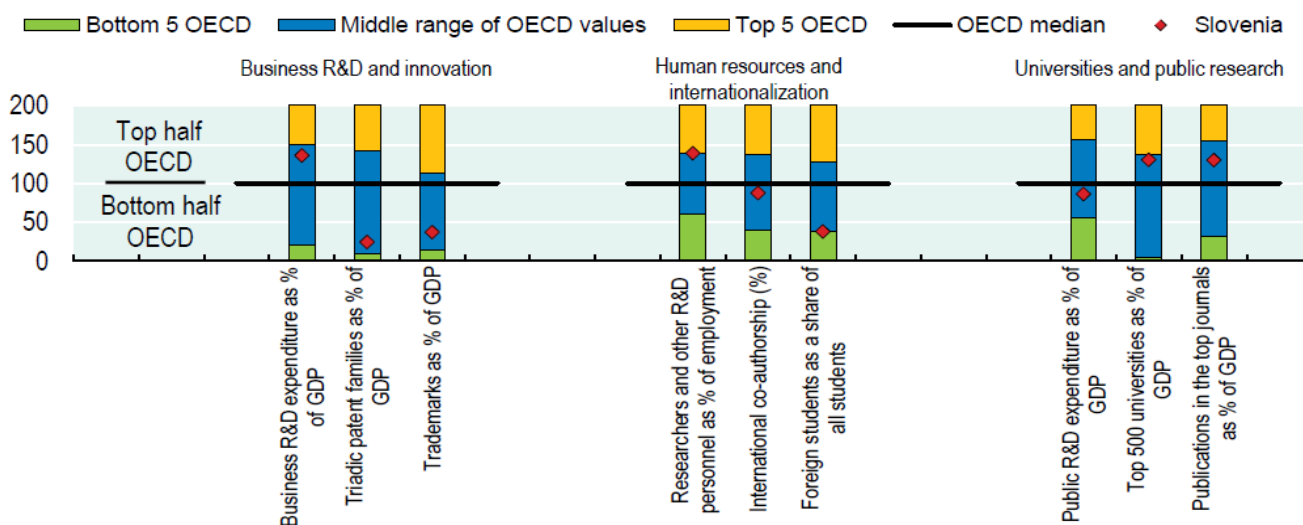
Figure 10: Costs to start a company



Source: Public administration scoreboard, p. 6

In respect to innovation and innovation capacity, we present the position of Slovenia among OECD countries. The main finding of the OECD's research is that Slovenia does well in terms of inputs into innovation process; however, its innovative activity is rather low.

Figure 11: Comparative performance of national science and innovation systems



Source: OECD Economic Surveys, Slovenia, 2015, p. 37

To sum up: the data on the case of Slovenia clearly shows that a mechanism for mastering requirements is needed at a system level. The Sustainable public administration model is offered as such a mechanism. Some findings in this respect have been presented in this article.

Discussion

On the basis of the previous presentation and of the illustrations provided, we shape the discussion around three basic points: stability and sustainability, innovation, and people. The latter point — the people — is too often neglected; yet, without the engagement and the commitment of people, nothing is possible.

Search for stability and sustainability

With the present time still being marked by financial crisis and examining the roles of states and their public administrations, the search for stability or 'ultra-stability' (according to Metcalfe, 2010) of the systems seems to be at its most important: simultaneous realization of structural changes and reforms at the system level at the same time as constantly improving the performance at the organizational level, through a series of incremental changes. The current economic situation indeed requires both types of changes, as well as systems, organizations and individuals who are qualified to implement both types of changes. However, reforms and structural

changes may not always be achieved in short time, especially if they are — according to Pollitt (2009) — connected to cultural change, involve changes to existing patterns, and require "retraining of large number of professional staff to work in new ways," among others. The aspect of stability is much emphasized by all international actors, including the European Commission and OECD.

Another important keyword is *sustainable public administration*. We can base the definition of sustainable public administration on the definition of sustainable development as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs" (Parrado and Löffler, 2009). From the methodological point of view, sustainability in the field of quality management in public administration is incorporated in ISO 9000 quality standards and in EFQM and CAF excellence models. All three have feedback loops in respect to learning and innovation. Indeed, to guarantee organizational development and sustainability, public administration organizations have to become learning organizations. The OECD's study (2010a) proved that learning organizations are positively associated with in-house innovation what is — again — part of the QM models and tools.

Innovation

In order to successfully address the future, innovation is required also in public administration. As declared in the OECD innovation strategy (2010b), innovation must be a priority in order to provide new solutions, and people should be empowered to innovate. Following the OECD's definition, innovation in public service delivery is "the implementation of new or significantly improved ways of providing goods and services" (ibid). From the methodological point of view, learning, innovation and sustained success are all basic parts of the QM models and tools.

Innovation in quality public services delivery can therefore principally not be found in the existing patterns and ways of operating but in opening for the new solutions and establishing partnerships. However, one has to be aware that open concepts are connected to risk taking so appropriate risk management has to be in place as well

as an appropriate level of regulation and control mechanisms to assure the credibility of the system as well as of the individual actors (Hill, 2008; Metcalfe, 2010).

Searching for innovation in an organization requires a serious approach of the organizational management; otherwise, it cannot be sustained (Daglio, Gerson, & Kitchen, 2014). Innovation by its definition means something new and can bring disturbances to the regular operation — it is therefore necessary to be integrated into the organizational modernisation and developmental processes.

People

Previously, new roles of public managers were already disposed. Here, we would like to discuss involvement and participation of public employees in general. Namely, new challenges and changed demands faced by all administrative systems, demand new solutions, approaches and methods of work and organisation. Most approaches are based on participation and partnership of everyone involved. This is valid for the interaction of an organisation with its environment — other organisations or individuals — and for its internal functioning. New approaches are based on a larger inclusion of all employees, increasing their responsibility and competencies. Additionally, such approaches are supported by new information and communication technologies which are increasing speed and accessibility, as well as bringing a larger degree of informal attitudes (Hill, 2008). Issues within an organisation usually surface in incorporating such an approach, or an individual method into an existing organisational structure, which is still fundamentally hierarchical in the public administration and the public sector (Demmke, 2004). This is especially valid for initiatives launched by lower levels of hierarchy.

When speaking of innovation, it is necessary for public administration organizations to create circumstances to make innovations possible (OECD, 2011b; Daglio, Gerson, & Kitchen, 2014). This requires not only new space for communication but new forms of communication and also thorough consideration that feedback loops are shorter and, even moving from existing approaches as benchmarking and bench learning into more creative ones, e.g. collaborative sense making or design thinking. As argued by Hill (2008), one of the means that make innovations possible are open concepts (a

concept of smart regulation being one of them), by using the power of alternative solutions. Open concepts also mean decentralisation instead of centralisation and establishing partnerships. Not only partnerships between public administration and its external stakeholders are important. What has been neglected too often was establishing partnerships with internal stakeholders and, in this respect, with the employees. Partnerships in the sense that employees are who make an organization and who “produce” satisfied customers. Even more so, no organizational modernisation can be implemented successfully without motivated employees. It is not by chance that quality management models, such as excellence models, are based also on the people — people are those who make the concepts and the goals ‘come true.’ Therefore, it is a requirement built in these models that employees are involved in all organisational processes whereas core, support or management processes, and that organisational goals are deployed to the level of employees. Only the employees who can successfully combine their individual goals with organizational goals are motivated enough to be proactive and innovative and to realize their full potential. Several other concepts, approaches and techniques confirm the need for motivated employees and are built on that need. To mention only a few of them: being seen as a part of a solution and not of a problem, empowerment, having a certain level of autonomy and of impact on the organization, being recognisable as an individual within and outside of an organization, internal entrepreneurship etc. It is not a coincidence that different quality approaches such as ISO 9000 standards or excellence models all converge on the same basic principles.

Findings and conclusions

Every state needs to have a public administration that is stable and sustainable, and capable of supporting its political management. And *vice versa*: political management of a state has to pursue for public administration that is stable and sustainable, and independent from current government or other political forces.

Main findings

In the article, we presented and argued the sustainable public administration model, as an answer to the research question: how to assure public administration that is sustainable, and capable of supporting its political management both in stable

and in turbulent times. The SPA model is based on three main components: *Continuous improvements in PA systems*, *Structural changes in the systems*, and *Innovation*. A cross-section of the three components represents the *Sustainability* in following the consensually agreed further developmental goals of the state.

Based on the discussion and the sustainable public administration model, three main conclusions are to be emphasized:

1. The more public administrations are strategic and performance oriented the more effectively they can support their political management in implementing state's development goals. This finding is in line with the results in international arena (OECD, 2010b; Schwab, 2012, 2016; Pitlik et al., 2012; World Economic Forum, 2016; IMD, 2016), and supported in contemporary works as well (Pitlik et al., 2012; Radu, 2015).
2. Achieving sustainability in order to ensure administrative capacity to effectively address current and future challenges require an appropriate balance between structural and incremental changes in the system, fostering innovation and building culture of innovation and change that is not only declarative, but properly institutionalized as well. We can lean this finding on the work of Metcalfe (2010), Roberts (2010), Parrado and Löffler (2009), Pollitt (2009).
3. Public administration organizations that act according to principles of total quality management are adequately prepared for coping with changes of practically any kind. To mention only a few examples: they are practicing customer / citizen orientation not only through their products and services but also through different kind of citizen involvement into consultation and decision-making processes, including setting the strategic objectives and designing the processes in a way that they do not cause administrative obstacles. Results in this respect may well be seen in the research by Pitlik et al. (2012).

However, it is a challenge for a public administration system to effectively adapt to demands especially in conditions of low administrative capacity. It is therefore crucial for states and their political management to increase *government efficiency* as compared in international context, to adequately support its economy as well as the citizens.

States need sound and strong political managements that are capable of assuring political consensus for its further development and progress. However, consensus on the development itself is not enough — also consensus on the manner of implementation of decisions that will assure effective mobilization and motivation of all resources required for implementation. In other words: political management needs a capable apparatus — state / public administration — for decision support and for implementation of decisions. Although the decisions are right, they can be useful only in short-term, or they cannot create synergy if the state is not capable of their implementation in the right way. Therefore, it is necessary to do the right things, as well to do them right. The administrative capacity of public administration is a strong support driver of a state's political management.

Therefore, the answer to the initial question from the title of this article is:

The state must define its vision and long-term developmental goals, should find the balance and synergy between structural changes needs and daily performance of its institutions — and the state could base this on a sustainable public administration model as presented in this article, in order to have a sustainable public administration.

Implications of the SPA model

Implications of a sustainable public administration model at an organizational level have already been presented: an organization that is capable to adjust its performance on a daily basis, seek for constant improvements and is set on principles of learning organizations will undoubtedly be more prepared to sudden changes that may affect its functioning.

Several institutional implications can be derived from the research conducted. They are related to national and international levels and actions. At an international level, an important implication is connected to further work of different international organizations and associations, such as EGPA, or the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) as well others, and possible connections of its activities within the working groups to the Europe 2020 strategy's goals and initiatives. Several initiatives

and programmes are already in progress. At the national level, institutional implications are related to strengthening public governance as well as public management and quality management in this context to ensure successful coordination between the roles that states have in respect to their national economies.

It is important to mention that in July 2015 the European Commission set up the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) aimed in helping the EU Member States to address implementation challenges in this respect. As communicated by the SRSS,¹ “the Service coordinates and provides tailor-made technical support to EU Member States, in cooperation with the relevant Commission services. The objective of providing such support to Member States is to help build more effective institutions, stronger governance frameworks and efficient public administrations. This would, in turn, underpin the institutional and administrative capacity that is needed to design and implement policies to support job creation and sustainable growth. Support is available to all EU Member States at their request, in particular — but not exclusively — in the context of EU economic governance processes.” Areas of assistance are: Budget, taxation, public financial management; Business environment, investment, innovation, competition, trade, energy, regulation and privatization; Employment, social inclusion, training, public health, pension, social welfare system; Efficient, modern, service-oriented public administrations and public procurement practices; Effective rule of law and combatting corruption, anti-money-laundering and anti-fraud, judicial systems; Access to finance, insolvency frameworks, legal and institutional issues related to financial institutions; Agriculture, rural development, education, energy, environment and transport; Migration and border control. The mission² of the SRSS is “Effective implementation of structural reforms, timely and adequate transposition of the Union acquis and efficient and effective use of the EU funds are vital to encourage investment, unlock the growth potential, raise living standards and support the process of convergence in the EU.”

At a national level, an important implication is finding the right balance between structural reforms and managing the already existing processes and structures. In

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/about/srss/index_en.htm

² Ibid.

strengthening the administrative capacity of public administrations, divergent approaches to overcome the gap between increasing complexity and ability of governments to control this complexity is needed.

Following the illustration on the case of Slovenia, we would like to sum up some implications at national level in this respect. Some of them may well be considered also in other countries.

1. Firstly, it is important to establish a common vision on further development at the state level and to identify goals, programmes and priorities. Following the knowledge on how political management and public administration may contribute to competitiveness of national economy this should be appropriately incorporated.
2. Leaning on the Sustainable public administration model has not only a strategic, but also a practical advantage. It helps all relevant actors to stay focused on their 'part of a job.' It is important to keep the activities in respect to continuous adjustment of public administration organizations functioning that are already going on and to incorporate them in broader system improving efforts and projects. In that way, adjusting and improving the performance according to incremental method can be established as a way of functioning after the review of government processes, together with other mechanisms of assuring high performing public administration.
3. Last but not least, it has to be emphasized that assuring sustainable public administration is a journey that goes far beyond a mandate of one government. In fact, it is an ongoing process of keeping public administration 'in good condition,' so that it can adequately support political management in fulfilling its core business: to contribute to the national economy's competitiveness and to assure the quality of life for citizens.

Areas for further investigation and research

The research conducted and presented in this article is a combination of descriptive method, secondary analysis of empirical research, and a case study of Slovenia in the context of the EU. It was our intention to offer a model of SPA for what available sources seemed to be adequate. They helped us to lean the model on realistic bases

and, on the other hand, they did not present constraints to our own synthesis process. Although some of the sources were analysed thoroughly, the main shortcoming or limitation of the research is in the fact that no additional data at a primary level was gathered for more in-depth insight into the topic. Therefore, we can indicate different areas for further investigation and research related to sustainable public administration already at that point.

Regarding the mechanisms and indicators that support recognizing the need for major or structural changes in the system, special attention could be given to causalities between management practices and innovation; the exploration of factors that drive the perception of government efficiency and trust; or the comparative analysis of good national practice examples that could result in identifying drivers for increasing sustainability of respective public administrations, etc.

In respect to implementing the sustainable public administration model, the exploration of requirements at a concrete national level that decision-makers need for implementation could be challenging. Additionally, comparisons between countries is possible in this respect, as well as investigations of the impact that maturity level of their respective public administrations have.

We mentioned only a few possible areas, as it was not our intention to provide a comprehensive list of possible future researches. We indicated some possibilities and share ideas in this respect to help researchers, scholars and practitioners to enrich the common knowledge, and then generate the right changes.

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