

Accreditation and other factors of supply and demand for high education programmes in the area of public sector management

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Abstract. Based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study aims at analyzing the absence of public sector management (so needed for the practice of public administration), as one of the essential subjects of the educational offer in the Czech and Slovak Republic. The qualitative analysis examines an assumption that the offer of programs in the management of public sector area is affected by the procedure of national accreditation. The quantitative part analyses the impact of selected indicators as an unemployment trend or nominal wages per number of students. The analysis was performed in Slovak setting. It is highly probable that the national system of accreditations, especially the Slovak one, considerably affects the study offer of the field in question. The conclusion hints at the fact that potential influencing factors – as unemployment growth or wage stability – do not act as motivation to study public area management.

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Introduction

The improvement of education in public sector management field (further on referred to as PSM) is one of the principal components of public administration reforms and modernization in the Central Eastern Europe area (further on also referred to as CEE). Expert opinions and studies [1, 2, 3] assert that insufficient training of public administration staff in CEE region affects the government's capacity or implementing programs and policies. Within the reforms, a multitude of market instruments was fully or partially implemented, following the change of regime in the public sector [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11]. The quality of how these instruments work is highly dependent on the staff's readiness to implement them in specific conditions of the region. Findings of the existing research in the Czech and Slovak Republic [12, 13] reveal that despite the actual need for public sector management practice, PSM as a discipline is not part of standard educational offer. In the Czech Republic (CR) as well as the Slovak Republic (SR), the offer consists of mostly classic educational programs (base on law, economics and public policy) and a couple of combined programs, which feature specific public administration elements. Nevertheless, the range is still inadequate.

Research method

This study aims at quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the causes of this status. The lack of PSM-oriented educational programs can be caused by several factors supply- as well as demand-related. One of the potential factors of insufficient

high education offer in terms of new approach to public sector management (New Public Management, NPM) are the national systems of accreditation of high education programs in CR and SR.

The key methods of scientific research in this study are the methods of classification analysis, method of comparison and abstraction for building theoretical-methodological framework of problem solving, method of causality analysis and comparison for verifying the research hypothesis in the application part of the study, and a method of synthesis and partial induction for concluding the research. For measuring the dependency, the correlation coefficient (Pearson coefficient) will be employed. This proceeds from covariance, which is a level of mixed variability of X and Y variables.

Primary research

Our study sees accreditation of educational institution (whether university or other provider of education) or its program (in relation to terminology and options of accreditation through legislation) as a process resulting in granting or not granting of accreditation. It can also be a process where an educational program becomes integrated in international cross-border network. International and supranational organizations appreciate quality of the educational program, based on their objective to standardize education in given field. An example of such accreditation with PSM-related programs is that awarded by EAAPAA (European Association for Public Administration Accreditation) or NASPAA (National Association of Schools of Public Affairs &

Administration).

System of accreditation in the Czech Republic

Accreditation was introduced pursuant to Higher Education Act 172/1990 Coll. In September 1990, pursuant to its provisions, the Accreditation Commission (AC) was established as a governmental advisory board. The legislation assumes that any study program is subject to accreditation awarded by ministry. If a study program is not accredited, study applicants cannot be admitted, no teaching or exams can be realized, and the institution is not entitled to award academic degrees. The accreditation application proceeds from ministry to the AC. Ministry decides whether to award accreditation based on the attitude the AC assumes. The accreditation is valid no more than 10 years.

Based on the legislation, AC has 31 members. It mostly consists of Czech universities professors, appointed by government with regard to minister's proposal. The membership of AC is incongruous with the position of rector, vice-rector or dean. For specialized preparation of its debates, AC has set up 22 advisory groups, the composition of which has to correspond to the type of study program, its form and study objectives.

The AC assessment considers working of the institution as well as the quality of its accredited activities. It follows the following criteria:

- Study content (the study program should reflect the national curricula, if these exist).
- Study program guarantors. Only professors or associate professors employed by the respective institution can guarantee quality and development of the study program. Specific guarantee requirements are specified by AC standard (last version is of September 2012).
- Teachers/lecturers- the principal courses should be safeguarded by a full-time employee of the respective institution.
- "Institutional assessment". It involves separate internal accreditation of the study program. The applied criteria are not fixed, their character is rather individual and they are geared to assessing high education activities set by Higher Education Act.

As set today, the accreditation system allows for considerable flexibility. On one hand, this is positive, as the accreditation can better reflect specificities of individual study programs and institutions that set those up. On the other hand, it can also be negative, since the variety and diversity in practice can result in a sense of discrimination, which AC fights through publishing all its reports and statement electronically. Although, the independence of AC on ministry is formally highlighted (and stressed even further by ministerial memorandum), the

ministry in fact has certain instruments to bypass the AC statement and rule out the accreditation out.

System of accreditation in the Slovak Republic

Considering the content as well as history, there are major differences in accreditation systems of CR and SR. Accreditation in SR is governed by Higher Education Act 172/1990, superseded by Act 131/2002. The details on how accreditation and AC works are set by government regulation (currently No. 253/2012).

In terms of realization, the Slovak process of accreditation involves two levels of decision-making. The principal part of accreditation is implemented by AC, which is formally a government's independent advisory body. The final decision is up to the Minister of Education.

Slovak AC has 21 members, appointed by Slovak government for six years' period. Any member can hold the office for two periods at maximum. For specialized preparation of its debates, AC has set up advisory working groups, the composition of which has to correspond to the type of study program, its form and study objectives. The members are university professors and experts of this field, who are working in the accreditation process willingly (the exception here being administrative workers).

The accreditation process is quite similar to the Czech one. The principal outcome is granting a right to award academic degree. If one simplifies a bit, the following criteria can be identified for SR: the quality of scientific activities of the educational institution, sufficient material and technical equipment, structure and number of academic workers, composition of examining committee at the final exam, the guarantor of the program, the content of the program, the length of study, final thesis (has to conform to length and structure-related criteria for both bachelor and master level, this criteria are set in advance), the selection of student candidates, requirements for passing the course/subject and requirements for awarding degree as well as the quality of graduates.

To limit SR accreditation drawbacks, a "complex accreditation" was introduced since 2008, which comes in useful in re-accreditation phase and its purpose is to assess the quality of the educational institutions and programs.

National accreditation in Czechia and Slovakia and the education supply in public sector management area

As suggested in the introductory section, neither CR nor SR provide supply of a standard PSM program on a high education level. This section deals with whether this could be conditioned by the national

systems of accreditation.

Accreditation systems in CR and SR are quite alike (except from the parallel system of „complex accreditation in SR). Both systems are quite simple, with minimal linkage to foreign experts and their experience. The accreditations are managed by state and conferred by government minister.

This system offers certain advantages, but the point here is to focus on the disadvantages and cons. One of the key ones undoubtedly is a low participation of foreign experts as well as poor absorption of their experience. In CR, the working group mostly consists of solely Czech Universities and their academics, while no link to any key PSM-oriented international organizations is present. SR sees the accreditation in PSM related to be guaranteed by two working groups, structured similarly.

This results from the fact that the language of the case in Czech or Slovak, which practically rules out any participation of foreign experts.

Furthermore, none of the Czech or Slovak working groups currently focuses on public management. In SR, the public management is explicitly involved in the “Law and public management” working group, consisting exclusively of lawyers. It is equally feasible to have the PSM-related program accredited in Economy or Social science working groups. SR has two such groups – Social and behavioral sciences and Economics and management. Considering that public management takes up roughly 30% of the created national product, the status is somewhat daunting.

Equally interesting problem to consider may be the (non)existence of minimal standards of PSM-related study programs. Up to day, the Slovak Accreditation Commission has not published any such standards for this field. Nor did it publish any list of programs providing an academic education related to PSM. SR features a list of study fields, which can be accredited to study programs and national curricula in the field (3.3.5 public management and regional development, 3.3.23 public economy and services and 3.1.7 public policy and public management). What is better? The unregulated situation in SR provides more space for universities in generating supply; on the other hand it does not directly encourage generating supply for PSM programs. The only real chance is an attempt of accrediting a PSM program in the Public economy and services field. Based on the above, one can put forward a scientific hypothesis on the existence of mutual relation of accreditation and the level of high education-driven supply and demand in the area of public sector management.

Secondary research: Analysis of other selected factors of supply and demand in the PSM-related

education

The situation of other factors, which can influence high education supply and demand in PSM area, can be verified by secondary quantitative research. Dependent variables are those, who enroll for public management-related study programs in SR, accredited within the above-mentioned study fields. Since no PSM-specialized program exists in SR, we need to make use of this approximating set.

Whereas the primary qualitative research focused on the impact of accreditation on supply and demand of the respective study programs, this part analyses further determinants as unemployment, wage developments in fields, where, based on the programs’ profile, the graduates should assert themselves.

While identifying the demand for PSM-related stud programs, we tracked the number of students who enrolled for these programs, graduated from them or studied those in 2004-2012.

Table 1. Applicants in PSM related study programs in SR

Number / years	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	average
PSM programs	6 425	5 877	5 366	4 800	3 120	4 145	4 246	3 653	2 555	4 240,4
Index	2,90	0,91	0,91	0,89	0,65	1,33	1,02	0,86	0,70	1,1
% variance	189	-89	-89	-11	-35	33	2	-14	-30	-4,9
All high education study programs (thousands)	72,8	50,8	52,9	53,2	51,1	54,0	52,7	51,8	48,1	

Source: [14]

The reporting period has noticed some uneven, though clearly decreasing trend of PSM-enrolled. The trend is even more visible, if compared to the trend of total number or students enrolled in high education in SR.

Another essential indicator is the development of the number of those studying and graduating from PSM-related fields. This development in the reporting period is shown in Table 2.

This indicator also reveals an apparent decrease in demand for PSM-related education in SR, especially relative to the total number of high education graduates.

Table 2. Students of PSM-related programs in SR

Number / years	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	average
PSM programs	1622	1413	1112	1196	1162	1065	1034	1034	953	1 198
Index	1,17	0,87	0,79	1,08	0,97	0,92	0,97	1,00	0,92	1,0
% variance	17	-13	-21	8	-3	-8	-3	0	-8	-3,4
Total graduates, thousands	28,9	30,7	34,2	38,8	53,3	60,7	57,0	54,1	50,5	

Source: [14].

The following paragraphs will analyze the relation of further selected independent factors, specifically unemployment, the number of PSM-enrolled or wage developments in fields, where, based on the profile of study programs, the graduates are expected to seek for their jobs.

Table 3. The dependence of the number of PSM applicants and unemployment rate

Number / years	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Graduates	-1,00	-0,81	-0,51	-0,34	-0,15	-0,19	-0,21	-0,27	-0,38
Minors	1,00	0,95	0,94	0,91	0,93	0,76	0,67	0,61	0,51
Long-term registered	-1,00	-0,79	-0,57	-0,36	0,02	0,04	0,02	-0,04	-0,22

Source: own calculations

Strikingly enough, the more unemployed high education graduates, the less PSM enrolled; the specific number being -0,34. Does this mean that the PSM studies are not entirely related to job security?

Table 4 analyses the relation of PSM study demand (i.e. the PSM-enrolled) and the nominal salary in respective fields.

Table 4. The dependency of demand for public management studies and nominal wages

Number / years	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
State administration	1,00	0,80	0,54	0,35	-0,07	-0,11	-0,13	-0,22	-0,37
Teaching	1,00	0,73	0,56	0,36	-0,07	-0,13	-0,15	-0,24	-0,39
Healthcare and social assistance	1,00	0,66	0,45	0,21	-0,23	-0,25	-0,25	-0,32	-0,47
Other social services	1,00	0,76	0,59	0,36	-0,11	-0,16	-0,18	-0,25	-0,38

Source: own calculations

Based on these results, we may observe that the demand for studying ŠPMVS is not positively affected by the nominal wage, despite it being a regulated and therefore “guaranteed” income. The problem here is that this wage of public management employees falls behind the average income and the performance-based assessment is not being realized systematically [15, 16]. From the perspective of pedagogical and borderline scientific fields, this dependency is being dealt with by Hroncová [17, 18].

Conclusion

This qualitative analysis indicated that the insufficient offer PSM-related study programs in CR and SR can be resulting from the existing system of national accreditations. The situation is more critical in Slovakia, where PSM still isn't a recognized study field, which further complicates any implementation of suitable educational practice for public management from abroad. In a market-oriented society, the demand should be of central importance, i.e. the state demand for educated professionals in the area of instruments of public sector management (as public contracts, outsourcing, PPP projects, performance evaluation, benchmarking, etc.), and of course the demand by students too.

The quantitative analysis in the second part clearly proves the decrease of interest in studying public management in SR; this in turn prevents the offer of PSM-related programs from being extended

any further. We demonstrated that the unemployment growth within national economy and the wages stability in public sector do not act as motivators for studying public management. For both CR and SR, it is equally worth noting that the study programs educating future public sector officials reveal an absence of educational quality standards as well as the qualification requirements of persons employed in this area. This problem further results in a sharp decline of job security in the respective fields guaranteed by an adequate high education. All that leads to demand for high education in PSM-oriented programs. As a result, this quantitative analysis clearly manifests that, in addition to the accreditation issue, the insufficient offer of PSM-related programs is also affected by the factor of labor market in the respective field.

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