

Foreword

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We open this year's first issue of the Journal with six papers dealing with the topics of decentralisation, local tax autonomy, strategy implementation, service provision in the context of intelligent public administration, and especially with two dedicated to equality institutions, corruption, and trust in institutions. The papers published in this volume are written by a total of 15 authors coming from Hungary, Brunei, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, making this issue extremely comparative and opening new perspectives and insights into the functioning of different public administration systems.

The first section features two papers dealing with local self-government. In *"No Countries for Municipalities?" – Old and New Faces of Centralisation in the Time of Crisis*, István Hoffman from Hungary analyses the tendencies of local self-government centralisation resulting from the increasing and wider use of information and communication technology and various digital platforms. Their wider application in public administration greatly reduces the space for the realisation of significant elements of the self-governing scope of competences, especially with regard to the reduced space for autonomous regulation of issues therein. The author recognises the so-called "soft" mechanisms of centralisation and points to different models and approaches resulting from a different geographical approach, primarily differentiating between the countries of the North and the South of Europe. The second paper titled *Tax Autonomy of Local Government: Comparison of Croatia and OECD Countries* was written by Robert Matić, Helena Blažić Pečarić and Maja Grdinić, all from Croatia and affiliated with the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Rijeka. The paper measures the autonomy of local units using a methodology developed and applied by the OECD. According to the results presented in the paper, Croatian local self-government lags behind the average of OECD countries and EU member countries which are also

OECD members. The paper also provides several practical recommendations on how to improve local tax autonomy.

The second section of this issue is dedicated to public management topics and includes two papers. In the first paper of the section, titled *A Review of Factors Influencing Strategy Implementation in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Framework*, author Afiqah Amin from Laksamana College of Business, Brunei Darussalam, tackles the issue of analysing the implementation of adopted strategies. She distinguishes between internal and external factors of strategy implementation and determines gaps in this process. Among the internal factors that influence strategy implementation, organisational structure, communication system, leadership style, organisational culture and technological infrastructure are mentioned in particular. The regulatory framework and available financial resources are cited as external factors. A group of authors from several universities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely Davor Radivojević, Mladen Radivojević, Đorđo Vasiljević, Bakir Čičak, Marija Kvasina, Hadžib Salkić, wrote a paper titled *Service Offering as a New Concept of Serving Users of Intelligent Public Administration*, exploring the concept of electronic and mobile services (em-services) as an integral part of “intelligent” administration. In particular, the paper elaborates the concept of em-services, their features, and standards for the development of such services.

This issue concludes with a section featuring two papers written by Croatian authors. These papers address the management of the so-called equality institutions and their role in the protection of human rights, as well as the perception of corruption and trust in institutions. Lora Vidović, civil servant from the City of Zagreb and Antonija Petričušić, associate professor from the University of Zagreb Faculty of Law, wrote a paper titled *Human Rights and Equality Institutions in Europe: Increasing Efficacy by Finding a Balance between Centralisation and Fragmentation*. Their paper analyses the management of institutions that are dedicated to the protection of human rights and the promotion of equality. With a comparative focus it examines different institutional management models of the analysed institutions, namely the advantages and disadvantages between centralised and decentralised models of their institutional setting. Jelena Budak and Bruno Škrinjarić, both from the Institute of Economics in Zagreb, wrote a paper on *Corruption and Trust in Institutions in Croatia Before and After the EU Membership*, where they use a longitudinal perspective and compare the results of surveys on the perception of corruption and trust in institutions in Croatia before and after joining the EU. Data from 2022 are compared with those from 1999 and subsequent years, resulting

in the observation that the perception of corruption is constantly growing. The main conclusions of the paper are that “corruption in the eyes of citizens is becoming the most important problem in Croatia, corrupt behaviour of public service employees is frequent and slightly increasing, the perceived frequency of corrupt practices in public institutions is visibly increasing, and the most affected by corruption are local and central government, political parties and the judiciary.”

On a different note, the Scientific Journal Ranking (SJR) for the year 2023 was recently published for journals that are included in the Scopus database. It is a pleasure to see that Croatian and Comparative Public Administration is recording stable and continuous growth in this ranking. In the last four years, we moved from SJR 0.101 in 2020, to SJR 0.170 in 2023, which translates into small, but continuous and stable growth in the very rigorous international competition of about two hundred excellent and very high-quality journals in the field of public administration. I believe this is due to the quality of the papers we publish in the Journal, which are increasingly widely read and cited. I hope to see these positive trends continuing in the future and the Journal growing in recognition and influence among public administration and other scholars of related scientific disciplines.

In this issue, we also publish two lists of reviewers who have reviewed numerous papers received in the past two years. These lists, as well as the published papers, reinforce the international orientation of our Journal and the effort to keep the quality of the published papers high. I hereby thank them all!

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Editor-in-Chief