

Introduction to Section 3: Public policy and public administration

John Wanna's contribution to public policy has been primarily related to the process of policymaking, primarily in Australia, rather than on any particular policy subject. He has followed developments and debates about the roles of the public service and ministerial advisers, the increasing level of consultation and collaboration with customers/clients/citizens and other stakeholders, and the consideration of implementation in the policy development process. These have been the subject of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) conferences and workshops John has organised, many of which have led to ANU Press books he has edited.

Policymaking is just one area of public administration (PA) that has gained his attention. As mentioned in the first section, Wanna specialised in budgeting and financial management, emphasising the important link between budgeting and managing more generally. He has closely followed in Australia and elsewhere similarities and differences in approaches to what might be seen as the broad trends over the last 50 years, from traditional Weberian PA through new public management (NPM) and on to new public governance (NPG).

Rod Rhodes, a long-time collaborator who also shares many personal and professional interests including as long-term editors of PA journals, has himself made a major contribution in identifying and analysing these broad trends, particularly the increasing extent of 'networking' across jurisdictions and with external organisations and interests. His chapter in this section explores further the different waves of NPG and his expectation that 'decentring' will become increasingly important.

This involves much more localised decision-making based on local 'stories', presenting central elites with considerable challenges. He does not present this as a panacea, but as a relevant and effective analytical tool for examining the practices of elected and accountable decision-makers as they respond to bottom-up pressures.

Andrew Podger and Hon Chan are two of the principals (with Wanna, Tsai-tsu Su, Ma Jun and Meili Niu) of the Greater China Australia Dialogue on Public Administration, which has organised annual workshops since 2011 and led to a large number of publications. Podger has known Wanna since the 1990s, when Wanna edited the *Australian Journal of Public Administration* and Podger was president of the ACT division of the Institute of Public Administration Australia; Chan has known Wanna since the early 2000s as Wanna began to include China in the countries whose financial management practices he was keen to explore.

In their chapter, Podger and Chan review and update developments in PA in the People's Republic of China. Since the opening up reforms commencing in 1978, China has not only embraced markets but accepted the associated need to reframe the role of government (the 'state' as Jim Jose would call it). China has consciously drawn from Western PA reform movements but, as Podger and Chan emphasise, it would be wrong to assume some long-term shift away from authoritarianism to a Western-style democracy. Instead, China has been selectively adopting and then adapting Western approaches to its own institutional and cultural practices as the impact of marketisation has taken hold. So far, the result has been extraordinarily successful in terms of poverty alleviation and many aspects of personal wellbeing of its citizens, but there are signs of a slowing down of reforms and some back-sliding associated with the current pursuit of a more centralised and nationalistic approach.

Jim Jose was a fellow postgraduate student of Wanna in 1981, and they have remained friends ever since. In his chapter, Jose stands back from the more practical aspects of PA and management that he believes Wanna has been pursuing since his time at the University of Adelaide, and explores whether such a practical perspective reflects a broader shift in PA scholarly work away from the role of the state itself. In concluding that it does, Jose is clearly uncomfortable, particularly as he sees NPM and the more recent focus on 'governance' as raising serious questions about the legitimacy of the state and its role vis-à-vis that of the market. Indeed, he echoes

Peter Aucoin's concerns about 'new political governance' and related problems with the governance paradigm, namely politicisation of the public sector and the concomitant decline of trust in government generally (Aucoin 2012). The very measures aimed at improving the state's flexibility, responsiveness and efficiency, he says, present the potential to weaken the state's legitimacy.

In his writings, Wanna has not, of course, endorsed all the developments and practices under NPM or NPG but has drawn attention to various shortcomings, most famously in the criticisms he and Rhodes made of 'public value' as applied in a Westminster system like Australia's (Rhodes and Wanna 2007). But Jose raises a more fundamental issue that is worth further consideration by both scholars and practitioners: whether aspects of recent and current PA reforms are going too far.

The three chapters provide an interesting 'umbrella' to the PA issues that Wanna has contributed so much to: the broad international trends that Australia has both contributed to and followed, the possible implications for the state itself and the widening scope of international PA studies. Much of Wanna's work, however, has been at a more detailed level below this umbrella, encompassing not only developments in policymaking processes but also changes in service delivery, human resource management, intergovernmental relations, the use of the 'third sector' of non-government organisations and the civil service as an institution. This work, like much of his scholarship, draws heavily on practitioners' experience and talks to practitioners in ways that are most likely to influence future practice. But these chapters remind us also of Wanna's appreciation of broader and higher-level aspects of PA, and the importance of linking practice to theory and vice versa.

References

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