Towards a set of specific competences for academic degree programmes in Public Administration in Europe

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Abstract

The authors present results of the first phase of “Tuning-PA”, a research project of EAPAA in collaboration with EGPA and NISPAcee on identifying and assessing competences relevant for academic degree programmes in Public Administration throughout Europe. The project is based on results of an EU-funded research programme called Tuning-initiative. The initiative collected competences and learning outcomes in a variety of academic disciplines but not in PA. The authors introduce the terminology of Tuning-PA, present a proposal of PA-specific competence domains and of sub-domains of these domains and discuss the empirical findings of an online survey about competences in use of altogether 46 PA-programmes across Europe. Finally, the next steps of the research project are introduced.

Key words: competences, learning outcomes, PA-programme, tuning, knowledge, skill, ability

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The Tuning-PA project is a research initiative of the European Association of Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) in collaboration with the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in central and eastern Europe (NISPAcee).
For more information see also www.tuning-pa.webnode.com
1. Introduction

Since a couple of years there is a new trend in higher education: Curricula do not only inform about the contents of an academic programme but also about the intended learning outcomes and the competences graduates should achieve when passing successfully the programme. There is a shift from teaching inputs to learning results which also broadens the perspective from a narrow teachers’ view to a more comprehensive learners’ view covering the various forms of learning. Such a change of perspective has several consequences, also for quality assurance and programme management. Identifying relevant competences of higher education programmes has become more and more important over the last two decades (Reichard 2013). Competences relate the study process via learning outcomes more directly with the labour market (focus on “employability” of the graduates) and support comparability and quality assurance of study programmes. Competences (particularly “core competences”) have become a building block of curriculum design and development. Various comprehensive research programmes like the Tuning-initiative (see below) or the “Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes” (AHELO; initiated 2009 by the OECD; see Tremblay et al 2013) are examples for identifying, assessing and comparing competences in the context of university education.

The emphasis on competences is not only an issue of university education but also of vocational training. An increasing role of “life-long learning” and higher mobility of trainees have fostered this development. Students and trainees are nowadays able to measure their learning efforts with a common system (European Credit Transfer System [ECTS] in higher education and ECVET for vocational training). These systems do not only cover traditional teaching inputs (e.g. lectures) but also various other forms of independent learning. Consequently, the focus of course syllabi and of assignments is more on learning results and thus on acquired competences instead only on teaching inputs. The orientation towards competences is a prerequisite for adjusting an educational programme more explicitly on the demands and requirements of the labour market or of specific recruiting organisations. Several governments in the last years have developed competence frameworks for their civil servants, e.g. in the UK, Belgium or in The Netherlands (see some examples in Horton et al 2002; for Belgium: Brans/Hondeghem 2005; Op de Beeck/Hondeghem 2010).

This article is a first result of the Tuning-PA project. Aim of this project is to identify a set of competences that are relevant for academic Public Administration (PA) degree programmes in Europe, and that can be used by the programmes to articulate their specific aims, profile and focus. The project is interested in competences expected from university graduates after having finished their BA or MA degree at the “Bologna Level 1 and 2” (and not in competences of midcareer officials etc.). The Tuning-PA project is based on the ‘Tuning Educational Structures in Europe’ initiative in which competences were developed for a number of disciplines (but not PA). The Tuning initiative which was funded by the EC, established a large network of collaborating universities in several European countries, covering numerous academic disciplines, collected and described general and subject-specific competences and published among other methods and tools a “Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles” (see e.g. Lokhoff et all 2010, Gonzalez/Wagenaar 2003 and 2008).

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3 In the last years, academic programs put more emphasis on the “employability” of graduates; see e.g. Atkins 1999.
4 The Tuning-PA project is a research initiative of EAPAA in collaboration with the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in central and eastern Europe (NISSPace). For further information on the Tuning-PA project see tuning-pa.webnode.com.
5 details about the EU-Tuning initiative: www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/
6 As an example for the development of competences in a discipline not too far from PA, see the competences-profile for Business Administration: Tuning project 2009.
Part of the Tuning methodology is the identification of a set of discipline-specific competences that can later be used in a survey among students, graduates, practitioners and teaching staff of European PA-programmes, in order to see what these groups of respondents in different countries find the most important competences. In the Tuning initiative those sets of discipline-specific competences were developed by expert groups. This will be the case in the Tuning-PA project as well; this article is a first step towards it.

The aim of this paper is to present results of the first step of the Tuning-PA project, i.e. of a survey about competences used by European PA-programmes. We want to draw a picture of the variety of competences which are already in use in the responding programmes and we will structure these competences in competence domains. Furthermore, we will assess the current practice of applying competences in PA-curricula and finally we will give an outlook on the next steps of the project.

In the first phase of the Tuning-PA project we conducted a survey among various academic PA-programmes throughout European universities. We asked about competences and learning outcomes that are mentioned in the syllabi and other documents of the respective PA-programmes. The results were collected in an “inventory of competences” which informs about the various competences and learning outcomes in use. In the following we will provide some evidence deriving from the inventory. We learned that programmes sometimes use “competences” as elements in the design of their programmes while other programmes are preferring “learning outcomes”. The terminology is not always consistent; programmes sometimes use other names, e.g. programme objectives or programme targets. Although all these terms can be distinguished from each other, the actual practice suggests that they are seen by the programmes as more or less synonymous. When looking for a set of competences to be used in the next phase of the Tuning-PA project, we will therefore use both categories (competences and learning outcomes) as we identified them in our survey across Europe.

Another distinction that can be made is between competences for graduates of bachelor programmes and for graduates of master programmes. Given the difference in level of the two types of programmes, this is important. The difference can be seen in two elements:

1. The kind of competences: bachelor and master programmes can train for different competences;  
2. The level of ‘realisation’ of a competence: in a master programme the same competence should be attained at a ‘higher’ level compared to a bachelor programme.

Because the level of attainment of a competence should be defined for each specific programme, the differentiation between the two degree levels is not very important for the purposes of the Tuning-PA project. Consequently, these two levels won’t be an issue of differentiation.

2. Basic definitions

**Competence:** There are quite different perceptions of the term “competence”, some see it as a “fuzzy concept” (Boon/van der Klink 2002). In our context of learning, a competence is a quality, ability, capacity or skill that is developed by and that belongs to the student. Competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, demonstration of knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values (Lokhoff et al 2010, 21; Winterton et al 2006, Hoffmann 1999). “Competence’ means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development” to attain specified effects (EU 2008, 12).
Sometimes, there is a distinction between “competency” and “competence” (Horton 2002, 4) where the first term is more related to the person having a certain capacity while the second term is related to the work and task to be fulfilled. Other authors interpret “competency” as a more holistic concept (Hoffmann 1999). We don’t make such a distinction in this paper and prefer to use only the term “competence”.

Fostering competences is the aim of educational programmes. Competences will be formed in one or more programmes, in various course units and assessed at different stages. As said, competences are obtained by the student. Competence-related learning concepts usually distinguish different dimensions or elements, e.g.

- knowledge (cognitive dimension)
- skills (with either an academic or a more practical focus)
- personal features like attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviors

A learning outcome “is a measurable result of a learning experience which allows to ascertain to which extent / level / standard a competence or a competence-element has been formed or enhanced” (Lokhoff et al 2010, 21). “Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after successful completion of a process of learning” (Lokhoff et al 2010, 22). They determine the verifiable learning achievements of a student at a given point in time and can be seen as an indicator for the acquisition of a competence. Learning outcomes are defined by the faculty/staff. They can/should be formulated on all levels of the curriculum: course unit, course, curriculum segment, and curriculum. The learning outcome can – and should - be measured in terms of competences.

Learning outcomes are linked with learning targets which are prescribed at the beginning of the learning process. Such targets may vary from very basic objectives (like memorizing) to quite demanding targets (e.g. analyzing, evaluating, creating; see the usual taxonomies of learning targets; e.g. Anderson et al 2001). Targets, outcomes and competences should be balanced – low targets will usually result in very modest outcomes and indirectly also in a respective competence achievement.

Although competences and learning outcomes are narrowly interrelated, it makes sense to distinguish these two terms (Lokhoff et al 2010). While the former term is describing an ability of the trainee, the latter is expressing those features of achieved competences which are resulting from a concrete learning process and which can be measured and assessed by others (e.g. teachers). However, for our purpose here the distinction between the two terms is not that relevant.

3. Types of competences in the field of PA

The Tuning-initiative makes a distinction between generic or universal competences and specific or functional competences (e.g. Gonzalez/Wagenaar 2008, 25ff.). While the first type is relevant for all kinds of study and training programs, the latter specifies competences for a discipline or more precisely for a certain program or a major part of it and often covers specific work-related requirements. Generic competences are competences that are ‘transferable’ from one discipline to the other. Consequently, we may distinguish among generic and PA-specific competences. With regard to the latter, it seems to be reasonable to concentrate on general public service-focused competences, i.e. on competences which are relevant for all various kinds of tasks and occupations in the public domain and which emphasize the specific “publicness” of this sector, e.g. abilities to cope with the context of the politico-administrative system or to be aware of the public interest. More specific competences – e.g. for specific policy fields or government levels – are not object of the following discussion.
Generic competences cover a wide array of personal and social abilities and attitudes. The TUNING-initiative differentiates between the following categories (Gonzalez/Wagenaar 2008, 29; similarly also the Dublin Descriptors [Joint Quality Initiative 2004], the EHEA Framework [EHEA 2005] and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, EQF [EU 2008]):

- instrumental competences (cognitive, technological, methodological skills etc)
- interpersonal competences (interaction with others, social skills)
- systemic competences (abilities and skills concerning the whole system, e.g. managing change or composing new systems)

Generic competences have become more relevant in recent times, particularly abilities like interpersonal and social competences or analytical competences. PA-related competences are considered as being relevant for all graduates intending to work in a public sector organisation or in the nonprofit sector. They emphasize the specific rationalities and framework conditions of the public domain (for studies about PA-competences see e.g. Brans/Hondeghem 2005, De Wet/Van der Waldt 2013, Horten et al 2002, Hunnius/Schuppan 2013, Krogt/Reichard 2012, Virtanen 2000). In the next sections we will present and discuss a selection of these competences.

4. Domains of competences

Before we look closer into the competences found in our inventory, we think at first that it is necessary to get an understanding of which areas should be covered by the PA-specific competences. PA has a broad and multi-faceted ‘area of practice’, so the competences used in this practice area will be very diverse. In a first step we establish a couple of ‘domains’ of competences that can be used for categorizing the coherent competences. The concept of ‘domains’ of competences is borrowed from NASPAA\(^7\) which is using these domains in its new accreditation rules.

4.1 NASPAA’s domains of required competencies

NASPAA’s actual accreditation rules are competence\(^8\) based. The NASPAA standard 5 relates to these competencies and reads as follows (NASPAA 2009)\(^9\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 5 Matching Operations with the Mission: Student Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.1 Universal Required Competencies:</strong> As the basis for its curriculum, the program will adopt a set of required competencies related to its mission and public service values. The required competencies will include five domains:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the ability</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to lead and manage in public governance;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to participate in and contribute to the policy process;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to articulate and apply a public service perspective;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.2 Mission-specific Required Competencies:</strong> The program will identify core competencies in other domains that are necessary and appropriate to implement its mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.3 Mission-specific Elective Competencies:</strong> The program will define its objectives and compe-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^7\) NASPAA: National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration
\(^8\) NASPAA is using the term “competency”, while in the Tuning initiative “competence” is used. In this project we will use both terms as equivalent but we prefer the term competence.
\(^9\) In Appendix 1 examples of competencies for the 5 required competence domains from NASPAA are presented.

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For more information see also [www.tuning-pa.webnode.com](http://www.tuning-pa.webnode.com)
4.4 Professional Competencies: The program will ensure that students learn to apply their education, such as through experiential exercises and interactions with practitioners across the broad range of public affairs, administration, and policy professions and sectors.

It is important to note that NASPAA is not prescribing certain specific competences, only certain competence domains. The programmes are free, based on their mission, to specify competences in these domains.

4.2 Some comments upon NASPAA’s competence domains

At first, the denomination of the domain ‘Lead & Manage’ needs some reflection. We propose to concentrate on “management” because we perceive “leadership” as the personnel-related perspective of management.

A second comment relates to research. In the five NASPAA-domains, or in the examples of competences of these five domains, research is mentioned only once (“Exercise ethical responsibility when conducting research...”). However, under “to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions” one of the examples is: “Employ analytical tools for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data, including appropriate statistical concepts and techniques”. Apparently, NASPAA does not see the training in research as an essential part of PA-education, which can be explained by the NASPAA-focus at professional MPA-programmes. Our perspective is, however, much broader: we are interested in competences which are related to very different types of academic degree programmes, including Bachelor and Master programmes at the Bologna levels and also to postgraduate programmes for midcareer or executive trainees. In principle, the competence approach is also relevant for PhD-programmes (Bologna level 3). Thus, research and the use of scientific methods play an important role.

Third, there is an overlap between “to participate in and contribute to the policy process” and “to articulate and apply a public service perspective”. For example, under the first issue is categorised “Describe and work within the institutional, structural, and political contexts of policy making”, while under the second we find “Distinguish short- from long-term fiscal consequences of program and policy decisions” (see appendix 1).

We don’t suggest that there should not be such an overlap, on the contrary: we accept an overlap between the different domains. However, we prefer a more strict interpretation of “to articulate and apply a public service perspective” in the sense that would focus this domain to competences that have to do with the public sector specificity, with public values and integrity.

Fourth, NASPAA does not differentiate between generic and discipline-specific competences which is in line with various other competence studies. If we look at the five NASPAA domains, two of them can be considered as being more generic:

- “to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions”
- “to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry”

When we look into the examples NASPAA provides for these two domains, we realize that not all examples of the first issue can be categorised as ‘generic’. Some are very specific for the public domain (like: “Understand and apply the legal context of public affairs, administration, and policy”). Nevertheless we interpret the first category as “generic” (see below).

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10 NASPAA is exclusively accrediting master programmes with an academic degree in public administration/affairs, most of which are targeted for midcareer professionals. Most of the times competences in research do not stand in the centre of such programmes.
Furthermore, it can be argued that ‘to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry’ is a generic competence as well. However, given the complexity of the public domain, and especially its interest-based nature, we suggest to differentiate communication from the generic competences and to address it as a separate PA-specific domain.

4.3 Towards a set of European competence domains for PA-education

Although we take NASPAA’s competence domains as starting point, we will modify them in order to:

- differentiate between generic and specific competences, as does the Tuning initiative. Thus, the NASPAA domain “to analyze, synthesize, think critically, solve problems and make decisions” is seen as representing a (broader) domain of generic competences (as defined by the Tuning initiative). However, the domain “to communicate and interact productively with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry” is kept – with some adjustment - as a specific domain;
- give more weight to “research”;
- incorporate all domains that can be extracted from the inventory of competences used in European PA-programmes.

To realise the last point we will check if the competences (and learning outcomes) we traced in our inventory can be allocated to one of the domains we distinguished so far. If not, we will have to decide if one or more additional domains should be added. After the necessary adjustments, we distinguish the following domains of competencies:

1. Competences related to manage in public governance;
2. Competences related to participate in and contribute to the policy and administrative processes;
3. Competences related to articulate and apply a public service perspective;
4. Competences to communicate and interact productively in the public domain;
5. Competences related to analyse and to solve PA-related problems by applying appropriate scientific methods
6. Generic competences (as far as they cannot better be subsumed under the above).


In the Tuning initiative generic competences were identified separate from discipline-specific ones. A set of 31 generic competences were formulated and considered as being relevant for all disciplines under review. In appendix 2 this set of generic competences can be found. Not surprisingly, some of the generic competences can be found under our PA-specific domains, although somewhat more specifically formulated for the public domain. This is the case for:

8. Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources (= research)
10. Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems (= policy process)
13. Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level (= research)
15. Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession (all)
18. Ability to communicate key information from one’s discipline or field to non-experts (= communication)
20. Ability to interact constructively with others regardless of background and culture and respecting diversity (= communication)
21. Ability to design and manage projects (= manage)
22. Ability to interact with others in a constructive manner, even when dealing with difficult issues (= communication)
26. Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced (= manage)
28. Commitment to tasks and responsibilities (= manage/ public service)

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30. Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness (public service)

Although the listed competences doubtless have a generic touch, they are – at least partly – also connected with one or more of the defined PA-specific competence-domains, because they show some specific features of the public domain. On the other hand, we don’t want to change the existing TUNING-list of generic competences as this list is important for comparative studies in different disciplines. Thus, we will accept duplication to some extent: Some competence aspects can be found in the PA-specific domains as well as in the list of generic competences.

Our proposal of competence domains was reviewed and discussed by an Expert Panel\(^\text{11}\) which we established in the Tuning-PA context. We asked the panel-members what they consider to be important domains of PA-competences, how they assess the presented set of domains, if they miss any important domain and in which subdomains they would like to split-up the domains. To summarize shortly the feedback of the Expert Panel: The members more or less agreed upon the proposed set of domains. The denomination of domain 3 was criticized as being quite vague ("public service perspective"). Furthermore, some members made proposals for identifying subdomains (see below for more details). Generally, the members of the panel found the composition of domains acceptable and supportive for further research.

However, there is an open issue that was also raised by some experts: how do we cope with scholarly competences, i.e. with competences related to the theory-based understanding of the public domain? Such competences are less relevant for future practitioners but they are essential for academic careers. They cover the whole array of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which are needed to conduct research and to fulfill other relevant academic functions. These competences are addressed to a different target group of learners: not to future PA-professionals but to future academics. Educating young academics is an important (and classical) mandate of universities. One could argue that such competences are subsumed under the domains we distinguished so far, particularly in number 5 and 6. However, because such competences are very vital to our discipline, we propose to concentrate them in a separate (seventh) domain:

\[ \text{Competences related to the (comparative) understanding of the basic theories and principles underlying the public domain, its historical socio-economic dynamics, and the skills to use this understanding for the solution of present-day problems in the public domain (short: understanding the public domain).} \]

\[ 4.4 \quad \text{A more detailed description of the specific PA-domains} \]

Up to now we have only loosely described the six PA-specific domains of competences\(^\text{12}\). Before we present the empirical findings of the survey, a more detailed description of the selected competences may help to better distinguish among them.

1. **Competences related to manage in public governance:**

   Competences related to understanding the way organisations in the public domain work, develop and can be changed, as well as in its internal as in its external aspects. Competences related to the understanding and use of different functions, concepts and instruments of the organisation and of its management. Competences related to the understanding and effective handling of relations between organisations and between organisations and the public.

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\(^{11}\) The Expert Panel consists of 6 practitioners from various European countries who are experts in public HRM and public sector training and recruitment.

\(^{12}\) As the generic competences are already described and listed by the Tuning-initiative, we don’t mention them here again as a separate category of competences.
2. **Competences related to participate in and contribute to the policy and administrative processes:**
   Competences related to the recognition, analysis and interpretation of problems in the public domain and their multi-disciplinary character. Competences related to understanding an effective formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

3. **Competences related to articulate and apply a public service perspective:**
   Competences related to the very specific nature of the public domain (public interest and interest groups) and the accompanying attitudes and values (like integrity).

4. **Competences to communicate and interact productively in the public domain:**
   Competences related to interaction and communication with diverse and changing groups of internal and external stakeholders.

5. **Competences related to analyse and solve PA-related problems by applying appropriate scientific methods:**
   Competences related to conduct research and to apply scientific-proven methods.

6. **Competences to understand the public domain:**
   Competences related to the (comparative) understanding of the basic theories and principles underlying the public domain, its historical socio-economic dynamics, and the skills to use this understanding for the solution of present-day problems in the public domain.

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5. **Some results of the inventory on competences used in European PA-programmes**

The most important issue of step 1 of the **Tuning-PA**-project was to conduct a survey among academic degree programmes in PA across Europe. Altogether 66 universities in Europe were contacted and invited to respond to an online-questionnaire, if their PA-programmes inform about competences and learning outcomes. 35 universities in 21 countries\(^{13}\) responded to our survey-invitation and they informed us about existing competences and learning outcomes of altogether 46 different degree programmes. Additionally, we evaluated 9 programmes which have been accredited in the last years by EAPAA and collected the competences which were listed in their self-evaluation reports.

35 of the 46 responding programmes informed us about existing competences and submitted the respective lists of competences and learning outcomes to us. Programmes with only very generally formulated “super-competences” are not included in this figure.

We collected and recorded all submitted competences\(^{14}\) and allocated them to the established six domains. Some of the competences we received were categorised under more than one domain. In light of the often rather general competences and the high degree of abstraction of the domains, this is neither strange, nor unwanted. The domains presented above cover all the competences we received. However, not all competences could be categorised easily under one of the domains (including the generic one). Sometimes a part of the competence could be categorised, but another part could not.

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\(^{13}\) Unfortunately, we did not receive responses from universities in Denmark, Italy, Spain and Sweden (and a few other countries).

\(^{14}\) As it was quite difficult to find in the responses clear distinctions between competences and learning outcomes and as several programmes mixed-up both categories, we did not exactly differentiate between the two types and collected all those abilities which we considered as “equivalent to a competence”...
In the following we present a list of competences – except generic competences - we received from our respondents. This list doesn’t include all recorded competences (this would be far too much for this paper). It shows a selection of those competences which we consider as being relevant for further discussions and for the next steps of the Tuning-PA project.

1. Competences to manage in public governance:
   - is able to participate in organisations and partnerships
   - managing diverse parts of the public sector
   - to act in demanding expert and leadership roles in the public domain
   - competences for international networking and cooperation
   - preparing and taking decisions based on sufficient information about alternatives etc
   - knowing how to design, plan and implement a project

2. Competences to participate in and contribute to the policy and administrative processes:
   - understanding principles of public policy, public administration and law
   - is able to develop, implement and evaluate policies
   - to participate in the formulation and implementation of public policies
   - skills to apply knowledge on policy and management, especially on his/her policy field
   - skills to analyse and interpret policy problems in terms of the relevant theories
   - is able to recognise a social, official, political or administrative problem and to re-formulate it as a public administration problem
   - is able to oversee politically strategic choices that need to be made in order to resolve social issues
   - developing a positive, but critically realistic attitude with respect to changes in policy and governance
   - knowledge of policy developments at all governance levels and in various sectors, focusing on strengthening good governance
   - is able to consider the problem from different disciplinary perspectives
   - is able to select and apply relevant techniques

3. Competences to articulate and apply a public service perspective:
   - is able to find his/her way in the public domain
   - is able to oversee politically strategic choices that need to be made in order to resolve social issues
   - is able to acquire the public service perspective and incorporate public service ethics
   - general knowledge of social, political and economic developments, political and public/administrative relations, and relevant administrative and legal problems
   - estimating the ethical and normative aspects of management decisions in the public sphere
   - dealing critically and responsibly with the relationships and tensions between personal values, professional values, values imposed by the organization where one is employed, and central, societal values
   - skills to imagine him/herself into the position of executives/politicians, other experts, citizens and representatives of civic organisations
   - is able to form the handling of the problem in compliance with the economic, political, legal and sociological reality
   - judging the performance of public organizations
   - fostering skills in evidence-based decision making, interpreting and applying policy agendas, anticipating future trends in public services, and adapting actions and activities to suit specif-

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15 See also the listed examples of competences in the NASPAA Self Study Instructions (App. 1)
ic public services contexts in order to support government (central, regional and local) in the
development and delivery of policy goals

- explore key concepts across institutional boundaries within the public domain
- be aware of the specific requirements of European integration, in relation to its processes
and institutions

4. Competences to communicate and interact productively in the public domain:

- is apt in social skills and communication skills
- skills to communicate, especially meet, think solution-oriented, and if necessary to negotiate
with executives/politicians, other experts, citizens and representatives of civic organisations
- communicating independently in the native language and at least in one foreign language, to
international audience as well
- being able to argue, to defend a point of view, to exhibit and to speak in public
- able to formulate advice to the most important stakeholders of public organizations on the
basis of research
- analysing and writing policy documents
- participating efficiently and effectively in meetings and negotiations
- cooperating, among other people, with professionals from other disciplines
- cooperating in multidisciplinary teams, acknowledging everyone’s position, interests and values

5. Competences to analyse and to solve PA-related problems by applying appropriate scientific
methods:

- is able to conduct applied research
- is able to select and employ modern administrative techniques
- ability to find new information in the fields of administration, law, economics, organisational
and information science in literature and in practice
- ability to follow and analyse research and development of the sector
- the capacity to make an autonomous, well-founded choice in one’s own research and to
communicate about this
- general knowledge of principles of statistics
- general knowledge of methods and techniques of social-scientific research
- skills to set up research, (let) execute, present, and judge and use the results in his/her
judgements
- is able to select relevant techniques
- is able to apply the policy- and other relevant techniques to the problem

6. Competences to understand the public domain:

- in-depth knowledge of the sector, its role in the wider economy and society, and the ability
to follow and analyse research and development of the sector
- developing the reflex to approach the field of public administration analytically and critically
- in-depth knowledge of the disciplines underlying public administration and their interrela-
tions
- understand the basic theories an principles underlying the public domain
- applying normative theory to articulate normative aspects of policy, governance and organi-
zation and to arrive at well-reasoned assessments
- normative beliefs about the tasks of the discipline of Public Administration with respect to
the professional practice of public administration and related disciplines
- place the present public domain in its socio-economic historical context
- understand processes of social changes especially those relevant to the public domain

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For more information see also www.tuning-pa.webnode.com
• compare and evaluate different PA systems
• use this understanding for the solution of present-day problems in the public domain

The selection of competences which were submitted by the responding PA-programmes draws a multifaceted picture of the competences in practical use. While some of them are rather general (almost “generic”), others are quite specific and probably only relevant for certain kinds of future employment of the respective learners. Some of the competences above are so vague and cover so many different features that the usefulness of such a competence is rather limited to describe learning requirements of a programme or a course.

Between the NASPAA-examples of competences (App. 1) and the submitted competences are some similarities. Some competences can be found in both lists. In a few cases, the NASPAA list covers a broader variety of competences and provides more concrete cases (e.g. “manage projects”, “prepare a budget”). For the second step of the Tuning-PA project it will be reasonable to include some of the NASPAA-examples in the list of competences to be assessed by the different respondents (see below).

Compared with the generic competences, the PA-specific competences refer heavily on knowledge and academic abilities. This is, however, not surprising given the use of them for curricula and course descriptions. We also have to be aware that the listed competences are quite generally focused on “Public Administration”, not on any sub-discipline or specialization and not for a particular academic level.

Generally, there is probably a dilemma between the commonality of a certain competence on the one side and the necessary specificity and concreteness on the other side. Academic degree programmes can never be very specific as they aim to train for universal and broad competences which are valid for very diverse positions (“employability”). Consequently, specific job-related competences will be rather the exception than the rule in academic programmes.

6. Identification of sub-domains for PA-specific competences

We could ‘simply’ use all the competences we recorded in our inventory that can be grouped clearly into one of the five domains as the basis for our next steps. However, we have to remember that the competences we received are ‘fine-tuned’ by the respective institution for a specific programme with a very specific mission. What we are looking for are more general descriptions of competences with some relevance for academic degree programmes. In other words: the competences in which we are interested should be not too (programme/mission-) specific but generally enough to be discussed and assessed by our partner-universities when moving forward to the next Tuning-step. Consequently, we have to analyse the competences recorded in our inventory to discover a more overarching formulation that gives room for differentiation if needed. We will call these generalized competences ‘subdomains’, to indicate that they are no single competences, but groups of competences. Below we present a proposal for subdomains which is based on the analysis of received competences and on some comments of the expert panel of the Tuning-PA project.

Subdomains for domain 1 “competences to manage in public governance”
1. Competences for executing management functions in public sector organisations
2. Competences (particularly) for leadership functions
3. Competences for networking and cooperation with other organisations

Subdomains for domain 2 “competences to participate in and contribute to the policy and administrative processes”
1. Competences for recognition, analysis and interpretation of social, official, political or administrative problems
2. Competences for consideration of problems from different disciplinary perspectives
3. Competences for policy formulation
4. Competences for policy implementation
5. Competences for policy evaluation

Subdomains for domain 3 “competences to articulate and apply a public service perspective”
1. Competences for understanding social, political and economic developments
2. Competences to handle problems with regard to the economic, political, legal and sociological reality
3. Competences to explore key concepts across institutional boundaries within the public sector
4. Competences to incorporate public service ethics and public values
5. Competences to analyse and to solve problems from the perspective of third parties, particularly politicians, professionals, citizens and representatives of civic organisations
6. Competences for evidence-based decision making, interpreting and applying policy agendas, anticipating future trends in public services, and adapting activities to suit specific public services contexts

Subdomains for domain 4 “competences to communicate and interact productively in the public domain”
1. Competences for communication with politicians, experts, citizens and representatives of civic organisations
2. Competences for formulating advice to important stakeholders
3. Competences for negotiation with politicians, experts, citizens and representatives of civic organisations
4. Competences for cooperating in multidisciplinary teams
5. Competences for communicating and interacting in an intercultural context

Subdomains for domain 5 “competences to analyse and to solve PA-related problems by applying appropriate scientific methods”
1. Competences to conduct applied research with regard to a given problem
2. Competences to select and apply appropriate methods, techniques and tools to analyse and solve a problem
3. Competences to be familiar with research developments in the respective policy field
4. Competences to use methods and techniques of socio-scientific research, including statistics
5. Competences to set up, execute, present, and assess research
6. Competences to use the results of research for decision-making or policy proposals

Subdomains for domain 6 “competences to understand the public domain”
1. Competences to understand the disciplines dealing with public administration
2. Competences to make use of the theoretical knowledge of the PA-related disciplines to analyse and solve problems in the public domain
3. Competences to compare and evaluate different PA systems

The listed subdomains cannot be separated accurately, there is some overlapping. Furthermore, the subdomains do not cover all relevant competences, there are some blanks which hopefully will be filled in the next steps of the Tuning-PA project.
7. Next steps of the Tuning-PA project

This paper presented a short summary of the results of the first step of the Tuning-PA project. The aim of this step was to take stock of the already existing competences (and learning outcomes) in a variety of European PA-programmes. Now we can refer to some empirical material of competences in practical use. In the next step we want to contact again selected PA-programmes in various European countries to collaborate with them in conducting a survey on the relevance of PA-specific competences. Methodologically, we intend to follow as much as possible the research design of the Tuning-initiative (Gonzalez/Wagenaar 2003; Lokhoff et al. 2010). In every country (we hope to cover the majority of countries participating in phase 1 also in phase 2) we will try to convince at least one university-department running a PA-programme to continue collaboration with us. Each affiliated department is expected to compose a selection of students, alumni, employers of graduates and faculty as respondents for an online survey. The minimum number of respondents should ensure an acceptable statistical result (usually >30 of each group, alumni eventually with a larger number and structured along professional experience, e.g. after one, three and five years of employment). The respondents will receive an online survey and they will be invited to assess the relevance of the listed PA-specific competences from their own viewpoint. The respondents will also be asked to assess to what extent the respective competence is a subject of teaching in the respective programme. The responses should be differentiated according to the level (BA, MA) and type of programme. Statistical analysis of the received responses will also differentiate between PA-specialisations (majors, electives etc) and the learning period.

8. Conclusions

A competence-based programme profile has several advantages, as was shown before. Because the Tuning-initiative did not cover public administration as a discipline, we initiated the Tuning-PA project some time ago. In this paper we informed about some results of the first phase of this project and we proposed a structure of domains and sub-domains of PA-specific competences. We hope to contribute to the development of competences in our academic field and to stimulate the discussion how to proceed further. We are confident that the results of this project will have an impact on the future discussion about curriculum development in public administration and particularly on the further evolution of quality assurance concepts in our field, particularly with regard to EAPAA. We expect that EAPAA’s accreditation criteria will evolve – comparable to NASPAA – towards a more outcome-oriented approach and will cover also the relevant competences.

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16 It is still an open question if we additionally study also the relevance of generic competences which have already been collected in the Tuning-initiative (see App. 2). On the one side, this type of competences was already empirically studied by the Tuning-initiative and consequently there seems to be a common understanding about the relevant generic competences. On the other side, it may be interesting to know if the stakeholders in the PA-field share the assessments of the interviewees of other disciplines as documented in the Tuning-initiative.

17 The choice of competences is still an open issue. The list which will be presented will cover at least the six domains and a variety of subdomains; eventually some more competences. However, the amount of listed competences must be transparent and manageable.

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**References**


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Appendix 1 Examples of competencies in the required NASPAA domains

Examples of competencies in the required domain of leading and managing in public governance might include but are not limited to:

- Apply public management models and organization theory
- Appraise the organizational environment, both internal and external, as well as the culture, politics and institutional setting
- Lead, manage, and serve a diverse workplace and citizenry
- Lead and manage people effectively, whether volunteers or compensated, fostering team building, commitment, creativity, and performance
- Manage projects
- Manage information and networks
- Manage contracts and public-private partnerships
- Resolve conflict and negotiate
- Understand the relationships between public policy, whether proposed or enacted, and leadership and management in implementation

Examples of competencies in the required domain of participating in and contributing to the policy process might include but are not limited to:

- Apply techniques for program evaluation and forecasting
- Describe and work within the institutional, structural, and political contexts of policy making
- Describe and execute the policymaking process, including defining the problem, setting the agenda, formulate policy, implement policy and evaluate policy
- Incorporate interest groups, executive-legislative relationships, judicial decision-making, and the media in the policy process
- Prepare a budget reflecting policy priorities
- Recognize the social construction of problems

Examples of competencies in the required domain of analyzing, synthesizing, thinking critically, solving problems, and making decisions might include but are not limited to:

- Articulate and apply methods for measuring and improving human performance
- Employ analytical tools for collecting, analyzing, presenting, and interpreting data, including appropriate statistical concepts and techniques
- Identify and employ alternative sources of funding, including grants, taxes, and fees
- Plan strategy
- Understand and apply the legal context of public affairs, administration, and policy
- Understand and apply theories of decision-making and models

Examples of competencies in the required domain of incorporating public values into decisions might include but are not limited to:

- Apply concepts of social equity to public affairs, administration, and policy
- Behave ethically and with integrity: Tell the truth, keep confidences, admit mistakes, and do not misrepresent oneself, one’s goals or the facts for personal advantage. Behave in a fair and ethical manner toward others.
- Distinguish short- from long-term fiscal consequences of program and policy decisions
- Exercise ethical responsibility when conducting research and making decisions

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18 NASPAA Self Study Instructions from 04.26.2013

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Identify the short- and long-term impacts of program and policy decisions on the physical environment
Understand and apply criteria appropriate to public affairs, administration, and policy

Examples of competencies in the required domain of communicating and interacting productively—face-to-face and/or electronically—with a diverse and changing workforce and citizenry may include but are not limited to:

- Communicate effectively in writing: Prepares clear, concise and well-organized written materials tailored to the audience’s level of expertise and needs.
- Communicate effectively in speech: Presents oral information accurately, clearly, concisely and persuasively tailored to audience’s level of expertise and needs.
- Demonstrate flexibility: adapts behavior and work methods to differences (whether they are differences in thought, communication style, perspective, age, interests, fairness or some other variable); to new information, to changing conditions and to unexpected obstacles.
- Demonstrate self-knowledge: awareness of one’s own stylistic preferences for relating to others, communicating with others, making decisions, managing yourself in groups, and the impact that this has on relationships and your ability to influence others.
- Evidence sensitivity and responsiveness to beliefs and behaviors associated with differences among people because of their ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, physical characteristics, religion, age, etc.
- Facilitate: Actively and effectively elicits information, views, input, suggestions, and involvement of others in pursuit of common goals; builds actionable consensus.
- Negotiate: Discerns the interests and values of others; surfaces assumptions; secures agreement on ground rules and tolerable outcomes; gains cooperation of others to accomplish goals.
- Relate to all kinds of people and develop appropriate rapport that leads to constructive and effective relationships; finds common ground with a wide range of stakeholders.
- Work productively in teams: Interacts effectively in a team, demonstrating composure, professionalism and effective working relationships, including understanding others’ priorities, needs and concerns and sharing information, expertise and resources.
Appendix 2: TUNING List of Generic Competences

1. Ability to communicate in a second (foreign) language
2. Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning
3. Ability to communicate both orally and through the written word in first language
4. Ability to be critical and self-critical
5. Ability to plan and manage time
6. Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning
7. Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)
8. Ability to search for, process and analyse information from a variety of sources
9. Ability to work autonomously
10. Ability to identify, pose and resolve problems
11. Ability to apply knowledge in practical situations
12. Ability to make reasoned decisions
13. Ability to undertake research at an appropriate level
14. Ability to work in a team
15. Knowledge and understanding of the subject area and understanding of the profession
16. Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals
17. Commitment to conservation of the environment
18. Ability to communicate key information from one’s discipline or field to non-experts
19. Ability for abstract and analytical thinking, and synthesis of ideas
20. Ability to interact constructively with others regardless of background and culture and respecting diversity
21. Ability to design and manage projects
22. Ability to interact with others in a constructive manner, even when dealing with difficult issues
23. Ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues
24. Commitment to health, well-being and safety
25. Ability to take the initiative and to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship and intellectual curiosity
26. Ability to evaluate and maintain the quality of work produced
27. Ability to use information and communications technologies
28. Commitment to tasks and responsibilities
29. Ability to adapt to and act in new situations and cope under pressure
30. Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness
31. Ability to work in an international context.

Lokhoff et al 2010, 63-64.