

## EDITOR'S NOTE

### PUBLIC POLICY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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As early as in 2007, Martin Potůček argued, in his paper for the *Central European Journal of Public Policy* (CEJPP), that Czech public policy had entered the stage of early adulthood. The goal of this special issue is to assess where we are today. Two lines for such assessment are followed by the articles in this special issue. The first line is aimed to answer the question of how public policy as a scientific discipline has grown, matured, and been gradually changed from both within and outside. The second line is concerned with the developments, trends, current situation and current problems in the practice of selected core policy areas.

Three papers in this issue follow the first line, trying to show how Czech public policy has been reacting to changes in polity and institutions (substantial decentralization, participation of a broad range of societal actors, role of experts etc.). However, the main focus is to show and analyse how public policy in the Czech Republic has changed from within. For a long time, public policy has been a part of other disciplines, especially sociology. Most of those involved in public policy research used to define their professional identity as “applied sociologists”. Hence, while acknowledging their specialization in public policy, they grounded their professional prestige in other fields like sociology, economics or public administration. All three articles clearly show that the step-by-step shift from “applied sociology” to a new, more autonomous identity is reality.

In the first paper, three dominant Czech schools of public policy are identified, with their unique approaches to the discipline (one in Prague and two in Brno). In addition, many other academic and research units deal with sectoral public policies – and at a highly advanced, internationally recognised level. Taking into the account the size of the country, we can argue that the Czech Republic has already approached the point of a “critical mass” of policy researchers for whom the boundaries of traditional disciplines are too restrictive.

A new identity is being formed around public policy and policy analysis; and the articles also clearly document an increased participation of Czech public policy researches in significant disciplinary events (such as the International Political Science Association, European Consortium for Policy Research or recently established specialised International Conference on Public Policy), their growing involvement in global networks of policy scholars and publication of a number of high-level articles in international journals.

Teaching is the focus of the second article – it includes detailed information about how public policy is taught at Czech universities. It demonstrates that public policy is already an established academic discipline, however fully specialised programmes are more an exemption than frequent practice. The good explanation for this might be that we are catering to the need to prepare multidisciplinary graduates, who are more flexible and better prepared to search for concrete jobs. The third article describes one specific teaching method that could be applied more frequently in teaching and researching public policies.

The remaining five papers deal with policy issues from a “practical” point of view. The following core policy areas are covered – pensions, health care, employment, higher education and e-government. The studies reveal several positive but also problematic aspects of selected Czech public policies.

The pension reform has been the subject of continuous discussions, and the recent attempt to introduce a three-pillar system failed, probably mainly at the level of implementation. However, the issue of demographic ageing must be addressed and an adequate response is essential for the pension system to survive.

Czech health care is an example of semi-successful transformation from centralised to modern system providing a universal and almost equal access to health services to all citizens. The reform was heavily based on introducing market-based tools into the system – privatisation, corporatisation and quasi-competition. Today it is fully visible that such changes delivered not only positive results but also many complications due to the economic and social specifics of health care.

E-government services are developing very fast in the Czech Republic, providing citizens and businesses with a much better contact with government institutions. The benefits of improved information, communication and transaction functions of government are obvious, but implementation failures are also visible – emphasis is put on the example of lack of capacities to procure solutions from the private sector.

The remaining two papers highlight implementation problems in the areas of higher education and employment services. Because of problems both in the

policy formulation and policy implementation phases, the reforms realised did not deliver effective outcomes. To learn why is also very important.

To summarise, this unique selection of articles can be to a large extent acknowledged as a mirror of the current state of Czech public policy – in terms of both institutions and implementation. The benefits of such assessment are obvious and we hope that all readers will enjoy the texts.