

Development of Public Administration and Governance in Central and Eastern Europe: Content Analysis of *The NISPAcee Journal*

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Abstract

Public administration (PA) as a discipline and public governance as a closely related concept have been developing constantly and rather rapidly in recent years. A particularly lively progress is characteristic of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), owing to its post-communist legacy and subsequent transition. This paper outlines the mainstream topics of PA development within *The NISPAcee Journal*, which covers the CEE region and beyond. The principal objective of the paper is to systematically and quantitatively codify a series of text documents that comprises 142 articles published between 2008 and 2016 in *The NISPAcee Journal*, in order to identify the characteristics of PA development in the region. The paper investigates three hypotheses: first, whether the quality of the articles changed throughout 2008–2016; second, whether *The NISPAcee Journal* attests a multidisciplinary orientation in terms of scientific contributions from different disciplines, and third, whether *The NISPAcee Journal* reflects the West-East knowledge transfer among PA academia. The three hypotheses were tested against seven analytical dimensions. The research findings reveal that governance is the prevailing cognitive paradigmatic approach of *The NISPAcee Journal*. Europeanisation is the common thread of almost all articles, with a particular emphasis on the ideological elements of the Neo-Weberian and New Public Management doctrines. Qualitative methodology is still the prevailing research method, and the occurrence of mixed methodology is rare. The topical orientation of the analysed manuscripts is very diverse. A considerable emphasis is placed on the analysis and development of PA as a discipline. The majority of researchers originate from CEE countries and focus their studies on Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. Scientific partnership between the Eastern and the Western academic worlds is still scarce. Given the low level of exchange of best

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academic practices between Western and Eastern Europe, research results indicate the need for an increased internationalisation of the NISPACEE Journal and a more holistic approach to tackle the future challenges of global and regional PA and public governance more adequately.

Keywords:

public administration, governance, research, discipline, Central and Eastern Europe, content analysis, NISPACEE Journal

1. Introduction

The role of public administration (PA) and the related public governance models have been constantly changing in recent years, in academia as well as in practice. Despite certain distinctions in PA development in the regional and historical perspective of Europe, which are due to different legacies (cf. Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014; Statskontoret 2005, 74–76), they all strive, to a certain extent at least, to converge towards a common PA framework of the European Union (EU).

Twenty-five years ago, the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration of Central and Eastern Europe (NISPACEE) was established for the purpose of providing an institutional framework and a professional association that would serve to promote the process of modernisation and transformation of PA systems as well as the democratic standards and principles in the region (Vintar et al. 2013). According to the NISPACEE internal bylaws (www.NISPA.org; NISPACEE 2018), the NISPACEE region covers 5 geographic areas: (1) countries that joined the EU in the 2004 enlargement (or later), (2) non-EU member countries in Central and Eastern Europe, (3) countries in the Western Balkans, (4) countries of Central Asia, and (5) countries in the Caucasus. These regions and countries share a common communist or socialist past (except Turkey), but form a heterogeneous group due to other legacies and present development incentives.

In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the political and economic transformation from communism and socialism, and the role of PA therein were shaped by a tendency towards the democratic, market-oriented economy of the West (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler 2017; Kovač and Bileišis 2017). Bulgaria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia all lie in Central and Eastern Europe and have been part of the EU since 2004 or 2007 or 2013. They strive for a pro-Western policy, and their economy is part of the common European market. On the other hand, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and Montenegro lie in the Western Balkans and thus in South Eastern Europe. Their economic, legal and administrative underdevelopment obstructs them to join the EU (Vintar et al. 2013). Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Turkey are located in Eastern Europe and are not EU members. They are less developed and, given their histori-

cal ties, economically bound to the Russian Federation (Turkey to a lesser extent). In addition, Ukraine and also Turkey wish to join the EU and aspire to divert their economies more to the Western market (Menon et al. 2015). Between Eastern Europe and Central Asia, there are the Caucasus countries: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. They have strong historical connections to both Russian and Turkish empires, under which they were administrated, and the impact of those economic dependencies has been preserved to this day. Their economy is poor and highly dependent on natural resources and agriculture. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan are located in Central Asia. Their political orientation is either neutral or pro-Russian. Neutral countries are Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, mostly because they produce their own energy. The pro-Russian group includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with much of the economy and military tied to Russia (Menon et al. 2015).

The research problem addressed in this article deals with the development of PA and governance in the NISPAcee region. The research is based on the analysis of seven analytical dimensions, namely: an article's typology, methodological approaches, topical orientation (the main topic and possibly the second prevailing one), EU and progress elements (Europeanisation), an article's cognitive paradigmatic approach, comparative characteristics, and the author's affiliation. The attributes of these analytical dimensions are listed in the Appendix. Thus, general PA trends in the NISPAcee region are identified, as shown by the results of the focused content analysis (CA) of the *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* (the NISPAcee Journal). The core mission of *The NISPAcee Journal* is to promote the development of PA and public policy issues in Central and Eastern (post-Communist) Europe and other (specific) PA dimensions in the broader NISPAcee region (Vintar et al. 2013).

The NISPAcee Journal has been issued since 2008 and is presently one of the leading PA journals in the NISPAcee region, indexed by Scopus and ESSCI (WoS). The journal is strongly focused on papers developing general PA and public policy theory, and on relevant PA and public policy issues based on empirical research carried out in Central and Eastern European countries. Having been issued for a period of nine years, the journal is supposed to display the progress of scientific quality throughout the analysed period. In general, the journal is seen to display a multidisciplinary character. *The NISPAcee Journal* publishes papers from authors affiliated with both Western and Eastern institutions and is therefore a model to study the knowledge transfer (NISPAcee 2018). Particularly, the new states that inherited the legacy of the Soviet PA slowly started to introduce Western administrative standards through well-known concepts of Neo-Weberian Public Administration (Drechsler 2005) and New Public Management (Peters 2008). Although it should not be surprising to find some similarities within any group of post-Soviet states in the NISPAcee region, there are some patterns specific to each group.

There are studies that systematically and holistically address the content of PA journal developments in Central and Eastern Europe or even broader (e.g. Nemec et al. in Ongaro and Van Thiel 2018; Kovač and Jukić 2017), but none of these focus explicitly on the NISPACEE region and simultaneously on a holistic PA development rather than its partial aspects. We find such research vital for the region because it provides an inside view of the trends and developments of PA in the last decade. The aim of the majority of the countries from the NISPACEE region is Europeanisation of the economy and policy-making, as well as PA modernisation. There is a need for analysing whether this aim is reflected in scientific literature. The aim of our research is thus to explore the trends and tendencies of published *NISPACEE Journal* articles and to find whether the ideas from Western PA academia are transferred to the East, i.e. the NISPACEE region. Our purpose is to fill the above-mentioned gap by exploring *The NISPACEE Journal* in a time perspective.

Seven analytical dimensions (as listed above) were examined to verify the following three aims of this article. Firstly, we study whether the content and the quality of the published articles changed in the period between 2008 and 2016. The first aim is examined through an article's typology, methodological approaches, topical orientation, and EU and progress elements (in short, "Europeanisation"). We assume that the quality of papers is increasing over time, which is demonstrated by more original papers, empirical research based articles, etc. published recently compared to the first years included in the study. Secondly, we investigate whether the journal attests a multidisciplinary orientation in terms of scientific contributions from different disciplines. This seems important due to different scholars pointing out that PA problems cannot be resolved based only on a monodisciplinary approach (see Raadschelders 2011; Koprić *et al.* 2014, etc). The second aim is addressed by defining the articles' cognitive paradigmatic approach, topical orientation, and comparative characteristics. If the orientation is multidisciplinary, all these dimensions generally contribute to the quality of research and better decision-making in practice. Thirdly, we wish to learn whether the Journal reflects the West-East knowledge transfer among PA academia. The third aim is examined by identifying the author's affiliation and topical orientation, presuming that co-authorships from both sub-regions and Eastern authors taking over "Western" topics prove such convergence (cf. Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2015). The results of the research may be useful for public policy-makers in broader Central and Eastern Europe to outline future PA reforms, in particular in the light of Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe and broader convergence trends in European PA.

2. Methodology

The main research method applied in this research is content analysis (CA). We analysed all papers published over the last nine years (2008–2016) in *The NISPACEE Journal* dealing exclusively with PA research. A total of 142 papers were found and

reviewed using an inductive qualitative CA method. CA is defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description” of communicated information (Berelson 1952, 18). It is the study of recorded human communications (Babbie 2001, 304) and a methodological measurement that is applied to text for social science purposes (Shapiro and Markoff 1997). The method has been gaining popularity and has been formally acknowledged as an equivalent research method in social science, including PA, in Northern America and Western Europe for at least the last 70 years (see Stemler 2001). Yet, it has not been very commonly used in social sciences in Central and Eastern Europe, where this research method has been much neglected and has acquired greater attention only in the last two decades. In PA, CA may be used to systematically categorise large amounts of data (texts, graphics, videos, etc.) into a pre-defined coding scheme, i.e. categories or topics that establish PA (Stemler 2001; Kovač and Jukić 2016). It can help identify the characteristics of PA research in selected regions and evaluate the methodological aspects of PA research, among others (see Perry and Kraemer 1986). Coding qualitative data by means of CA allows researchers to summarise data quantitatively and examine (repeated) patterns. A CA covering a period of nine years can indeed detect the existing trends and progress in terms of scientific quality.

This research was conducted in the following way. Based on a literature review of prior studies addressing CA in PA, a coding scheme (instrument) was developed by two CA analysts (co-authors of this paper) with different academic backgrounds (policy analysis and law), which contributes to a more holistic research design and results. Initially, the researchers worked separately on the definition of the coding categories. After several rounds of discussion, the final coding scheme (categories) was unanimously prepared. Pilot testing and coding scheme refinement were preliminarily conducted on a sample of papers. In case of disagreement, both researchers discussed the issue in order to (re)define the appropriate codes. In qualitative research, the content analysts are not neutral towards their research subject (Lincoln and Guba 1989). In order to avoid sampling errors and problems of validity of the constructs, the researchers examined the full population. Since construct validity is the main issue of CA (Erlandson *et al.* 1993), the researchers relied on the established categories. Each researcher coded each paper separately. Therefore, the starting point of our CA of PA research in the NISPAce region was the methodological and conceptual approach, with some modifications formerly applied by the researchers (e.g. Kovač and Jukić 2016) who performed CA within CEE countries, and other authors (Lan and Anders 2000; Peci and Fornazin 2017) who applied a paradigmatic evaluation of PA research in other countries. New categories were added only when the content of the paper did not fit into the existing ones. Based on literature and our empirical data, the initial categories were expanded in order to include, for example, a cognitive paradigmatic approach and EU and progress elements (Europeanisation). In the final stage, a quantitative analysis was performed and the results were interpreted.

Microsoft Excel was used for quantitative analysis and data presentation. All the findings are presented in timelines and graphs. Based on theoretical background and literature overview, we articulated three baseline hypotheses, examined by the application of the analytical dimensions as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Hypotheses and analytical dimensions

Hypotheses	Analytical dimensions to be examined
Hypothesis 1: <i>The NISPACEE Journal</i> and thus PA in the NISPACEE region demonstrates progress in time regarding the scientific quality.	Article's typology, methodological approaches, topical orientation, EU and progress elements (Europeanisation).
Hypothesis 2: Multidisciplinary orientation is characteristic of <i>The NISPACEE Journal</i> .	Article's cognitive paradigmatic approach, topical orientation, and comparative characteristics.
Hypothesis 3: Eastern European academics follow the discussion of key topics introduced by Western authors in <i>The NISPACEE Journal</i> .	Author's affiliation, topical orientation.

Source: own research.

The CA of PA progress in Central and Eastern Europe within *The NISPACEE Journal* was conducted, and analytical dimensions from Table 1 were analysed according to the coding scheme (full list available in the Appendix). The cognitive paradigmatic approach is based on the conceptualisation of Peci and Fornazin (2017) and is divided into seven subcategories that explain the different ways of studying PA. These subcategories include Legal, Managerial & Economic, Political & Institutional & Public Policy, and others as listed in the Appendix. Topical orientation explains the main content focus of the article (see Kovač and Jukić 2017). It consists of categories such as Human rights (including civil society), Regulation of PA & Better regulation & Administrative barriers, etc. EU and progress elements (Europeanisation) includes Democratic consolidation (freedom of speech, human rights, etc.), Neo-Weberian or NPM, Market liberalisation (if not NPM), and others (see Appendix).

This study is exploratory in nature. Therefore, the findings should provide a good starting point for researchers to embark on a more comprehensive study of the NISPACEE region and beyond.

3. Results

3.1 Scientific quality

The first hypothesis states: *The NISPACEE Journal and thus PA in the NISPACEE region demonstrates progress in time regarding the scientific quality.* The scientific quality of

The NISPAcee Journal in 2008–2016 was examined by analysing the following article characteristics: (i) article's typology; (ii) methodology approaches; (iii) topical orientation; and (iv) EU and progress elements (Europeanisation).

Regarding the last element, the trend towards Europeanisation presents a prevailing and desirable PA framework for countries within and outside the EU borders (see Bevir 2011; Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2015; Kovač and Bileišis 2017). In this respect, as well as in terms of administrative aspects, the process of Europeanisation is understood as a process of construction, diffusion, and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, policy paradigms, procedures and norms, good administration, and common European Administrative Space (hereinafter: EAS) in the national and sub-national legal, political and administrative structures of the countries (Cini 2007, 407). Therefore, this dimension was considered crucial to our analysis of PA development in the region, as it also reflects a high quality of research, comparativism and multidisciplinary. EU and progress elements (Europeanisation) were measured by analysing the presence of six elements characteristic of EU countries: 1 – Democratic consolidation (Freedom of speech, Human rights, etc.), 2 – EU Integration, EU-lex, Europeanisation, EU policies, 3 – Elements of Neo-Weberian or NPM, 4 – Element of market liberalisation (if not NPM), 5 – Exchange of practices (if not 1–4), and 6 – Other (online participation, motivation, etc.). The elements 1–6 represent concepts and practices through which the European values are pursued (see Kovač and Jukić 2017; Kovač and Bileišis 2017; Koprić et al. 2014).

The NISPAcee Journal is published twice annually, usually in the form of one regular and one special issue. To establish improvements in time regarding the scientific quality, we first determined each article's typology. As Table 2 shows, out of the 142 articles published between 2008 and 2016 included in this analysis, 79 were classified as original scientific articles (55.63 %), 42 as conference proceedings (29.58 %), and 17 as keynote speeches, issue notes or acknowledgements (11.97 %), with an additional 4 as professional articles (2.82 %). On average, 15.8 papers are published per year. One can clearly see that scientific contributions in the form of original scientific articles and conference proceedings are a dominant category, accounting for as much as 85.21 %.

In a time perspective, these findings imply that the category "original scientific article" as such had been consistently changing throughout the analysed period, with an exceptional growth in 2016 (400.0 %). The average annual growth rate over the years (2008–2016) is 10.5 % and points to an encouraging progress in time regarding the scientific quality (Table 3).

Figure 1 provides a summary of the methodological dimensions applied. As regards the research methods, the results demonstrate that on average the majority of papers (80.99 %) follows a qualitative approach, 7.75 % a quantitative approach, and 11.27 % a mixed methodology. These findings are stable across all years of ob-

Table 2
Article's typology (2008–2016)

Article's typology	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total	Share (in %)
1 – Original scientific article	9	15	7	7	4	6	7	4	20	79	55.63%
2 – Professional article	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2.82%
3 – Conference proceedings	0	0	6	7	6	7	8	8	0	42	29.58%
4 – Keynote speaker, Issue note, acknowledgement	4	1	2	0	3	5	0	1	1	17	11.97%
Total per year	15	18	15	14	13	18	15	13	21	142	
Average per issue	7.5	9	7.5	7	6.5	9	7.5	6.5	10.5	15.78*	

Source: own research (* average per year).

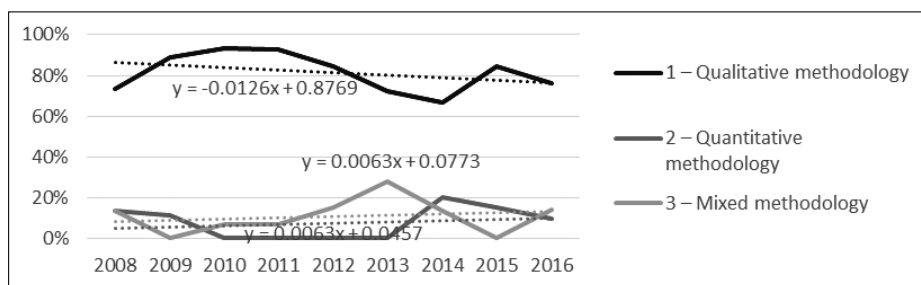
Table 3
Original scientific article's average annual growth rate expressed in %

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Average growth rate
Growth rate	66.7 %	-53.3 %	0.0 %	-42.9 %	50.0 %	16.7 %	-42.9 %	400.0 %	10.5 %

Source: own research.

servation and are not unexpected, especially in comparison to the first two cognitive paradigmatic approaches – governance/PA (35.21 %) and political/institutional/public policy (21.13 %), which, as expected, both use mostly a qualitative approach, while the management/economic approach more often uses quantitative or mixed methodology, the share of which is lower (19.72 %). This is in line with the results of the CAs of public administrative journals in the region. In general, our empirical results confirm the untapped potential in terms of the use of quantitative and, especially, mixed methodology as an indicator of higher scientific quality, which speaks against Hypothesis 1.

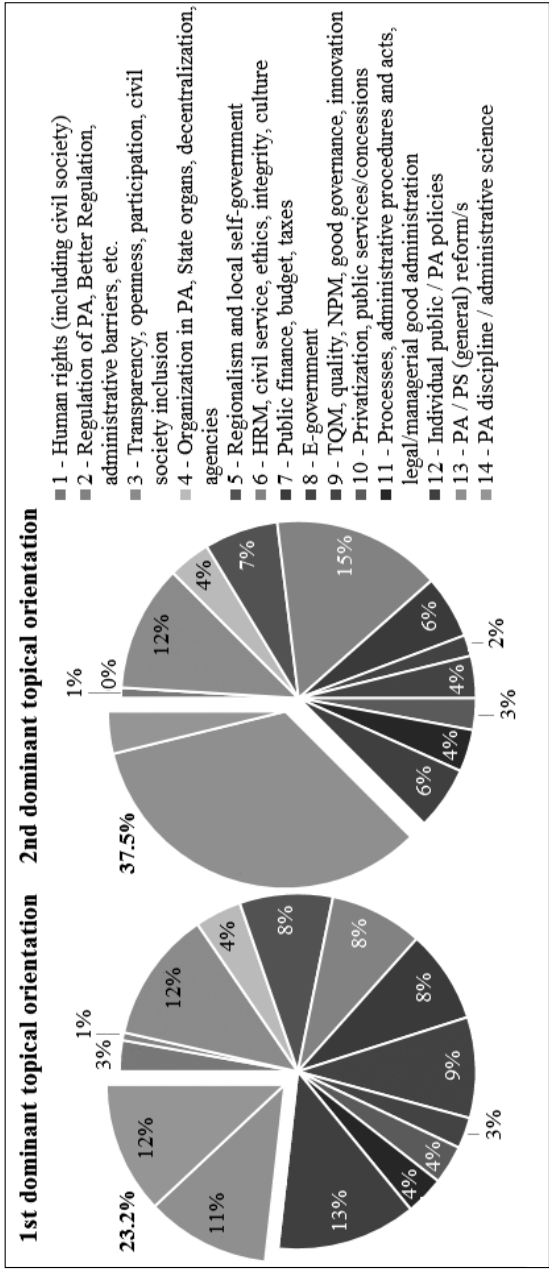
Figure 1
Methodological approaches (in %)



Source: own research.

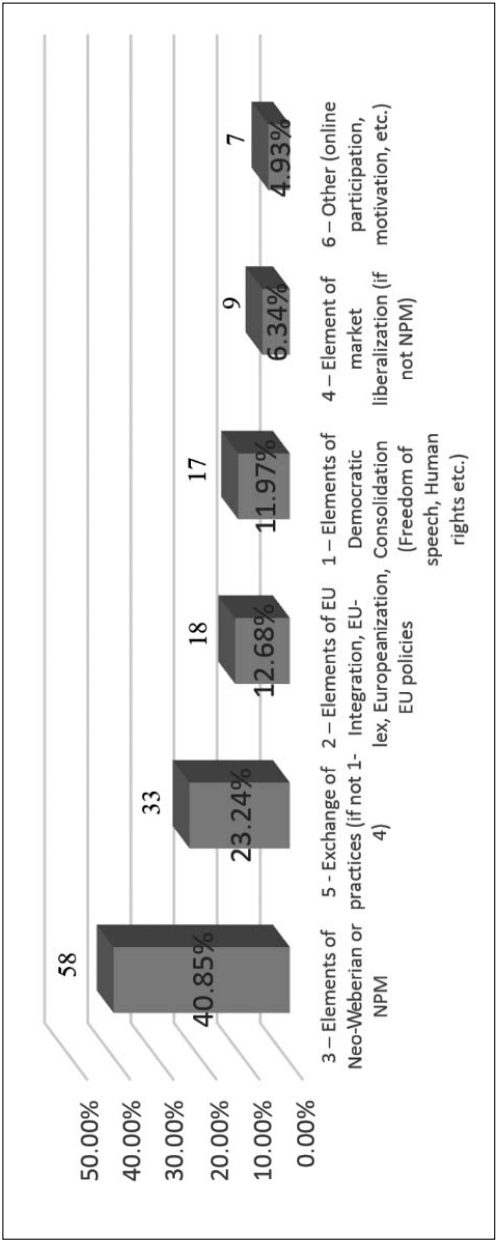
In order to define the journal's progress in terms of scientific quality within the whole time span (2008–2016) in more detail, we determined the articles' first and second topical orientation. The scientific progress of PA may be observed through categories *PA/PS (general) reform/s* and *PA discipline/administrative science*, which may be used as a good proxy. *The NISPAcee Journal* is a PA journal; therefore, its quality may be measured in terms of topical contributions from the categories of *PA/PS (general) reform/s* and *PA discipline/administrative science*. The higher the number of topical orientation in the field of PA, the more does *The NISPAcee Journal* contribute to PA as a science/discipline and to PA reforms. Therefore, PA topical orientations (numbered 13 and 14) contribute to the scientific quality of the journal. In this respect, we performed a time series analysis (data not shown) and discovered there were no longitudinal patterns in terms of topical orientation. In Figure 2, pie charts demonstrate the most frequent topical orientations in the articles in 2008–2016. Categories 13 and 14 are proportionally well represented, meaning that 23.2 % of the articles in *The NISPAcee Journal* deals# with topics that cover PA as a discipline/science or PA reforms as the first topical orientation (and 37.5 % as the second topical orientation).

Figure 2
First and second topical orientation addressed



Source: own research.

Figure 3
EU and progressive elements addressed



Source: own research.

In order to verify the journal's progress in time, we further analysed the existence of EU and progress elements. We found it important – according to the journal's mission on PA development in the region – for these elements to be defined in almost every paper (Figure 3). With 40.85 % (that is 58 out of all 142 papers), the Neo-Weberian/NPM elements stand out. These governance models can be seen as a common thread of numerous papers and therefore at least to a certain extent a key characteristic of the PA discipline in general in Central and Eastern Europe (see the same conclusions in Raadschelders 2011; Vintar et al. 2013; Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014; Koprić et al. 2014; Kovač and Bileišis 2017).

Other observed elements include exchange of practices (23.34 % or 33 out of 142 papers), EU-related issues (12.68 % or 18 out of 142 papers), and democratic consolidation (11.97 % or 17 out of 142 papers). Empirically, in a time perspective, no radical Europeanisation is detected, which goes in line with the findings of other studies (see, for example, Hofmann 2008; Koprić et al. 2014; Kovač and Jukić 2017). These suggest that progress regarding the Neo-Weberian doctrine or the Europeanisation process requires small incremental paces since adequate administrative capacity must go hand in hand with academic contributions and the policy implementation process in order to prevent administrative overload.

3.2 Multidisciplinary orientation

The second hypothesis is: *Multidisciplinary orientation is characteristic of the NISPACEE Journal*. To examine the multidisciplinary orientation of *The NISPACEE Journal*, we adopted a 2x2 model developed by Kovač and Jukić (2016) and Peci and Fornazin (2017) and tailored it to our purposes. Each paper was analysed and sorted regarding its cognitive paradigmatic approach and topical orientation through descriptive statistics (and without longitudinal changes analysis). Both dimensions are significant because PA must address PA phenomena in a scientific and multidisciplinary manner with the purpose of successfully resolving the complexity of the PA paradigm (Bevir 2011; Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2015). Given the regional orientation of *The NISPACEE Journal* focusing on PA in Central and Eastern Europe and the Scopus indexation, which implies higher academic quality, we assumed a great diversity of both cognitive paradigmatic approaches and topical orientations. The cognitive paradigmatic approach (see Peci and Fornazin 2017) explains the different ways of studying PA, while topical orientation explains the main content focus of the article (see Kovač and Jukić 2017).

Owing to the historical and regional development of the NISPACEE region, legal and managerial paradigmatic approaches were largely anticipated. However, empirical results demonstrate the contrary, namely that the most frequent cognitive paradigmatic approaches are (see Table 4): (i) governance/PA; (ii) political/institutional/public policy; (iii) managerial/economic. With 35.2 %, governance/PA is the dominant paradigmatic approach in the NISPACEE region, which confirms a mod-

ern holistic trend of the journal as opposed to other PA journals in the region initially oriented primarily on legal or economic aspects (e.g. the Slovene journal *IPAR*; Kovač and Jukić 2016). Governance/PA is followed by political/institutional/public policy (21.1 %) and managerial/economic (19.7 %), while pure legal aspects seem to be neglected, especially due to a high level of the good governance paradigm. The importance of good governance thus indicates the recent cross-disciplinary developments in the region. The results show that the analysed Journal is an autonomous and integral hub for PA in the region (see e.g. Bevir 2011; Raadschelders 2011). In general, the results demonstrate that *The NISPAcee Journal* reflects the global principles of contemporary PA. The fact that governance is the most important PA paradigmatic approach indicates the effort for effective and subsequent growth of democratic political-administrative systems in the NISPAcee region. In addition, governance as a disciplinary framework reflects a multidisciplinary character by combining papers otherwise primarily oriented towards economics, law or policy. Such an approach is required to resolve contemporary globalised PA issues (Hofmann 2008, 663; Trondal and Peters 2013).

Table 4
Cognitive paradigmatic approach

PA-related cognitive paradigmatic approaches	First approach	
	F	Share (%)
1 – Legal	11	7.7 %
2 – Managerial & Economic	28	19.7 %
3 – Political & Institutional & Public Policy	30	21.1 %
4 – E-Gov/ICT	6	4.2 %
5 – Governance/Public Administration (PA)	50	35.2 %
6 – Epistemological	16	11.3 %
7 – Other (Ethical, Historical, Cultural, Integrated)	1	0.7 %
8 – Not applicable	/	/
Total	142	100.0 %

Source: own research.

The analysis of the first topical orientation reveals that the most frequent PA-related topical orientations (Table 5) are actually (i) individual public/PA policies (12.7 %); (ii) PA discipline/administrative science (12.0 %); (iii) transparency, openness, participation, civil society inclusion (12.0 %); (iv) PA/public sector (general) reform(s) (11.3 %); and (v) e-government (9.2 %). The results unambiguously display a multidisciplinary orientation of the journal and confirm the findings of other CA analysts (e.g. Bingham and Bowen 1994; Kovač and Jukić 2016).

44.5 % of articles are categorised under the first topical orientation, in comparison to 24.0 % that deal with more basic topics of PA law and organisation. In this regard, Hypothesis 2, stating that a multidisciplinary orientation is characteristic of *The NISPACEE Journal*, can be fully confirmed.

Table 5
Dominant topical orientation

PA related topical orientation	First topic		Second topic	
	f	Share (%)	f	Share (%)
1 – Human rights (including civil society)	4	2.8 %	1	0.7 %
2 – Regulation of PA, better regulation, administrative barriers, etc.	1	0.7 %	0	0.0 %
3 – Transparency, openness, participation, civil society inclusion	17	12.0 %	12	8.5 %
4 – Organisation in PA, state organs, decentralisation, agencies	6	4.2 %	4	2.8 %
5 – Regionalism and local self-government	12	8.5 %	7	4.9 %
6 – HRM, civil service, ethics, integrity, culture	12	8.5 %	16	11.3 %
7 – Public finances, budget, taxes	12	8.5 %	6	4.2 %
8 – E-government	13	9.2 %	2	1.4 %
9 – TQM, quality, NPM, good governance, innovation	4	2.8 %	4	2.8 %
10 – Privatisation, public services/concessions	5	3.5 %	3	2.1 %
11 – Processes, procedures/acts, legal good administration	5	3.5 %	4	2.8 %
12 – Individual public/PA policies	18	12.7 %	6	4.2 %
13 – PA/PS (general) reform/s	16	11.3 %	35	24.6 %
14 – PA discipline/administrative science	17	12.0 %	4	2.8 %
15 – Not applicable	/	/	38	26.8 %
Total		100.0 %	142	100.0 %

Source: own research.

As regards comparative methods, the analysed papers reflect a significant effort for a broader geographical and multidisciplinary focus of research. With 85.9 % of the papers including some type(s) of comparative element(s), the Journal's declaratory orientation towards multidisciplinary and internationalisation is confirmed (Table 6). However, one should bear in mind that different types of comparison are included, not only regionally or nationally (together approximately in 23 % or 34 of all articles) but also in a time perspective as the most frequent type with 41 %

or 58 out of 142 articles. This is not surprising given the Scopus indexation of *The NISPAcee Journal*, which demands high quality papers that go beyond elementary analysis (cf. Raadschelders and Vigoda-Gadot 2015; Ongaro and Van Thiel 2018).

Table 6
Comparative research of papers in the NISPAcee Journal

Comparative research	f	Share (%)
1 – Yes. Comparison among regions	9	6.3 %
2 – Yes. Comparison among countries	23	16.2 %
3 – Yes. Comparison among municipalities (& regions within a country)	9	6.3 %
4 – Yes. Comparison among organisations (Business. Ministries. NGO.)	10	7.0 %
5 – Yes. Country/ies vs. EU	9	6.3 %
6 – Yes. Comparison among subunits (Taxes. CAF criteria, etc.)	4	2.8 %
7 – Yes. Time-based comparison (if not 1–6)	58	40.8 %
8 – None	20	14.1 %

Source: own research.

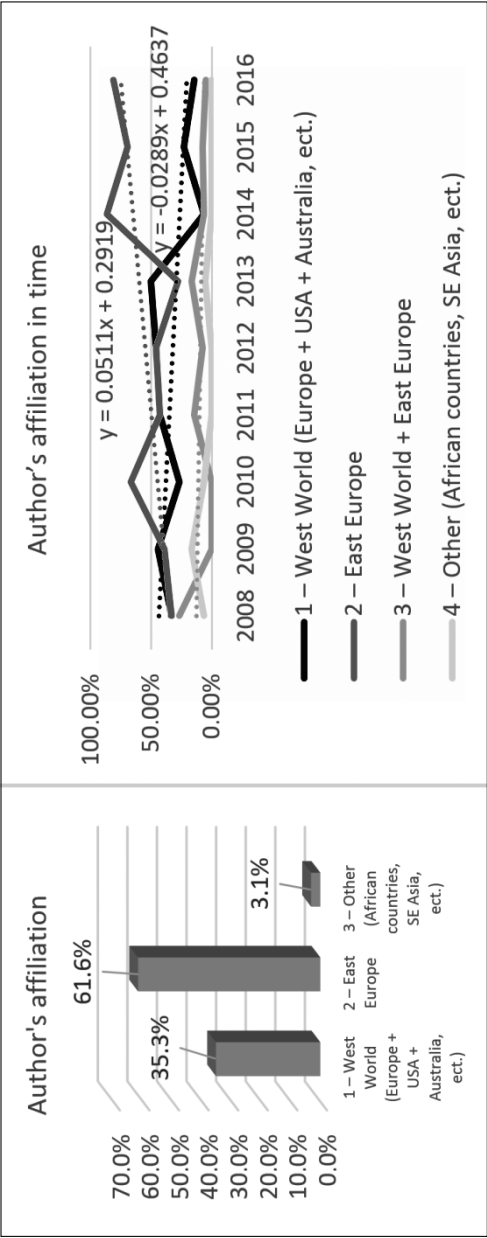
In addition, as explained above, the articles present a high level of Europeanisation, which reveals the author(s)' efforts to lessen the implementation gap between academia and administrative reality and, thereby, strive for better administration. Nevertheless, we find that territorial comparisons should be pursued further in terms of the journal's editorial policy, scope and aims.

3.3 Transfer from West to East

The third hypothesis, *Eastern European academics follow the discussion of key topics introduced by Western authors in the NISPAcee Journal*, deals with knowledge transfer over time. To check whether Eastern European academics follow the discussion of key topics introduced by Western authors in *The NISPAcee Journal*, as assumed, we first verified the authors' affiliation (see the coding scheme in the Appendix). Among the authors, 138 (61.6%) originate from Central and Eastern Europe, 79 (35.3%) come from the West, while only seven (3.1%) have other origins (Figure 4). Then, we analysed authors' affiliation over time in order to evaluate the changing pattern of the authors in the journal, as well as to identify a possible increase of co-publication of Western and Eastern authors as one of the indicators of the West-East knowledge transfer.

The analysis reveals an explicit and gradual accretion of publications from Central and Eastern Europe ($\beta=+0.05$), accounting for a 5.11 % increase per year. Simultaneously, contributions from the Western World show a slight downward trend

Figure 4
Authors' affiliation and authors' affiliation over time



Source: own research.

($\beta = -0.03$; Figure 4). More importantly, the analysis reveals an enduring appearance of papers written jointly by Western and Eastern researchers. In 2008–2016, 31.7 % (or 45) of the articles were written exclusively by Western authors, 54.9 % (or 78) exclusively by Eastern authors, and 4.2 % (or 6) by authors from other areas. 9.2 % (or 13) were written in collaboration between Western and Eastern authors. This trend was consistent throughout the period observed (Figure 4).

We also analysed the topical orientation of the articles in terms of authors' affiliations. We compared the most prominent topical orientations in the papers by Western authors and Eastern authors. Among the key topical orientations that stand out are 3 – Transparency, openness, participation, civil society inclusion; 6 – HRM, civil service, ethics, integrity, culture; 7 – Public finances, budget, taxes, and 12 – Individual public/PA policies.

4. Discussion

The role of PA and governance in the NISPAcee region is constantly changing. We explored the development of PA in the NISPAcee region by a content analysis of *The NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* in the 2008–2016 period. Our exploratory focus was the article's typology, methodological approaches, topical orientation, EU and progress elements (Europeanisation), cognitive paradigmatic approaches, comparative characteristics, and author's affiliation.

Concerning progress in time (Hypothesis 1), our analysis discovered firstly that the article's typology demonstrates progress, with original scientific articles recording an average annual growth of 10.5 %. Second, the applied methodological approaches show untapped potential in terms of use of quantitative and, especially, mixed methodology, while quantitatively, the papers focusing on PA reform/s and PA as administrative science by first topical orientation reflect an unaltered state, and that topical orientations related to PA are well represented. Regarding the content, the most frequent EU and progress elements (indicating Europeanisation) appear as a common thread in the papers are Neo-Weberian elements or NPM, together with elements of exchange of good practices.

As regards Hypothesis 1, the obtained results are mixed. Some progress is shown in the high level of Europeanisation and improvements in article's typology. There is still room for improvement concerning the use of methodology that is more advanced and more articles that primarily focus on the development of PA as a science and on PA reforms. Hence, it follows that Hypothesis 1 cannot be fully confirmed. The multidisciplinary orientation of the NISPAcee Journal is demonstrated as follows: (1) the most frequent cognitive paradigmatic approach is governance/PA (35.2 %), which demonstrates the holistic nature of the Journal; (2) the topical orientation clearly denotes a great variety of the topics published, varying from PA policy and PA discipline/science to transparency, openness, participation,

civil society inclusion, PA reforms, and e-government; (3) the vast majority of the papers (85.9 %) exhibit comparative elements, especially time-based comparison and comparison among countries. Based on these findings, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed. A comprehensive multidisciplinary and geographical focus of research is among the main objectives of *The NISPACEE Journal*.

The importance of individual public policies and PA as a discipline and science indicates the heterogeneous character of *The NISPACEE Journal*. Although some researchers (e.g. Koprić et al. 2014, 326) may argue that the journal's topical dispersion is only an instantaneous window-dressing for or indirectly forced by the EU, the rather long continuity of nine years certainly proves otherwise. This is the case especially since various contemporary challenges in the society are addressed (such as human rights, regionalism and local self-government, HRM, public finances, privatisation and administrative procedures, etc.). The journal exhibits a balance of diverse topical orientations, which reflects a rapid response to the temporary development of PA phenomena in a globalised society. Prominent topical orientations – including scientific development of PA as discipline/science, PA reforms, transparency, openness, participation, and e-government – further demonstrate the high topical complexity.

The persistence of legalism or, on the contrary, the orientation to managerialism only, and the continuous debates on the pros and cons of centralisation or decentralisation are further ongoing issues in the region (see Vintar et al. 2013; Koprić et al. 2014; Kovač and Bileišis 2017). The persistence of legalism tells a story of heritage of Weberian bureaucracy. The administrations of the Visegrad group and Slovenia, and to some extent Croatia, have a clear heritage of the Austrian-German administrative tradition, where formalisation of procedures under the principle of the *Rechtsstaat* is seen as a crucial element of “good administration”. Moreover, the European Administrative Space also pursues a convergent development of national systems based on common principles of administrative law and good administration (see Trondal and Peters 2013, who see phases of national PAs as follows: (i) independence, (ii) integration, and (iii) co-optation). Consequently, this field, striving for PA beyond formality and actual effectiveness, should be addressed in the future as well, in line with others, such as the civil service system or regionalism (cf. Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014; Ongaro and Van Thiel 2018).

The knowledge transfer from the West to the East was examined under Hypothesis 3. The results demonstrate: (1) the number of author(s) originating from Central and Eastern Europe is dominant and firmly increasing. There is also a stable presence of papers written jointly by Western and Eastern researchers (9.2 %); (2) topical orientations frequently discussed by Western authors are transparency, openness, participation, civil society inclusion; HRM, civil service, ethics, integrity, culture; public finances, budget, taxes; and individual public/PA policies. The knowledge transfer from West to East was not fully confirmed, although a stable

presence of articles written jointly by authors from West and East is optimistic. A further strengthening of the multi- and transdisciplinary approach, including a higher level of pro-West and global orientation of the Journal, should be necessary in the future in order to effectively address contemporary PA issues, especially in terms of the East-West dialogue.

The identification of the main trends between 2008 and 2016 may help practitioners to better understand the evolution of PA developments and practice in Central and Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Research results demonstrate that PA progress in these regions varies depending on the Europeanisation process that embraces wide-ranging cognitive and structural changes within a country's political system. The results of the paper could be used for academics and practitioners in public administration when setting new reform objectives with regard to developments in the area. We revealed several PA scientific (sub)areas that are subject to constant discussion in the scientific community. These PA (sub)areas should see the transfer from science to practice.

5. Conclusion

Public administration (PA) will always need to reflect societal changes and thus evolve over time. Since Central and Eastern Europe (still) faces (post) transition problems, PA and governance development are even more important. In this respect, scientifically based studies as deployed through *The NISPAcee Journal* are of the utmost significance to support policy-making and implementation in the region. As expected, there are many convergences regarding the overall Europeanisation, as well as certain systemic gaps and divergences due to different stages of development in individual countries. In this context, it is worth emphasising that PA and its reforms need to be addressed in a multi- if not interdisciplinary way in order to be successful in resolving cross-sectional problems in a global world. In this sense, all PA-related disciplines are important and need to be taken into account, rather than solely political science and public management. In practice, CEE countries need to join up their capacities to learn from each other and to develop democratic and efficient public administration and governance. *The NISPAcee Journal* can significantly support these goals, as long as the editorial policy pursues openness, inclusion and diversity, internationalisation and a multidisciplinary approach, based on sound scientific research.

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Appendix: Content Analysis Coding Scheme

- 1. Paper ID**
- 2. Paper author(s)**
- 3. Author(s)' institution(s)**
- 4. Paper title**
- 5. Article typology**
 - 1 – Original scientific article
 - 2 – Professional article
 - 3 – Conference proceedings
 - 4 – Keynote. Issue note. Acknowledgement
- 6. Edition type**
 - 1 – Regular edition
 - 2 – Special edition
- 7. Year**
 - 1–9 – 2008–2016
- 8. First cognitive paradigmatic approach**
 - 1 – Legal
 - 2 – Managerial & Economic
 - 3 – Political & Institutional & Public Policy
 - 4 – E-Gov/ICT
 - 5 – Governance/Public Administration (PA)
 - 6 – Epistemological
 - 7 – Other (Ethical. Historical. Cultural. Integrated)
- 9. EU and progress elements**
 - 1 – Elements of Democratic Consolidation (Freedom of speech. Human rights etc.)
 - 2 – Elements of EU Integration. EU-lex. Europeanisation. EU policies
 - 3 – Elements of Neo-Weberian or NPM
 - 4 – Element of market liberalisation (if not NPM)
 - 5 – Exchange of practices (if not 1–4)
 - 6 – Other (Online participation. Motivation. etc.)
 - 7 – Not applicable
- 10. Methodological approaches**
 - 1 – Qualitative methodology
 - 2 – Quantitative methodology
 - 3 – Mixed methodology
- 11. First dominant topical orientation**
 - 1 – Human rights (including civil society)
 - 2 – Regulation of PA. Better Regulation. Administrative barriers, etc.
 - 3 – Transparency. Openness. Participation. Civil society inclusion

- 4 – Organisation in PA. State organs. Decentralisation. Agencies
- 5 – Regionalism and local self-government
- 6 – HRM. Civil service. Ethics. Integrity. Culture
- 7 – Public finances. Budget. Taxes
- 8 – E-government
- 9 – TQM. NPM. Good governance. Innovation
- 10 – Privatisation. Public services/concessions
- 11 – Processes. Procedures/acts. Legal good administration
- 12 – Individual public/PA policies: (free entry)
- 13 – PA/PS (general) reform/s
- 14 – PA discipline/administrative science

12. Second dominant topical orientation

- 1–14 – As ad 11.
- 15 – Not applicable

13. Affiliation- origins Author 1

- 1 – Western World (Europe & USA & Australia, etc.)
- 2 – Central and Eastern Europe
- 3 – Other (African countries. SE Asia, etc.)

14. Affiliation- origins Author 2

- 1–2 – As ad 13.
- 3 – Western World & Central and Eastern Europe
- 4 – Other (African countries. SE Asia, etc.)
- 5 – Not applicable

15. Affiliation- origins Author 3

- 1–5 – As ad 13.

16. If more than 1

- 1 – West (Europe & USA & Australia, etc.)
- 2 – Central and Eastern Europe
- 3 – Western & Central and Eastern Europe
- 4 – Other (African countries. SE Asia, etc.)
- 5 – Not applicable/None

17. Comparative research

- 1 – Yes. Comparison among regions of countries
- 2 – Yes. Comparison among countries
- 3 – Yes. Comparison among municipalities (& regions within a country)
- 4 – Yes. Comparison among organisations (Business. Ministries. NGO.)
- 5 – Yes. Country/ies vs. EU
- 6 – Yes. Comparison among subunits (Taxes. CAF criteria, etc.)
- 7 – Yes. Time-based comparison (if not 1–6)
- 8 – None