

# POLITICAL SCIENCE, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THE DANISH CIVIL SERVICE PROFESSION

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The history of Danish political science is young, and public administration has from the beginning been part of the training of political scientists. This background reflects a double strategy: first, in order to ensure political scientists a position in the labour market, they were launched as a new kind of generalist, competing with lawyers and economists. Second, public administration has from the very beginning been seen as a subfield of political science. Even if the institutions engaging in PA research and training have varying profiles, the integration of the discipline in political science is still dominant. So far it has been a success, whether measured at the level of political science graduates in the civil service or the level of PA research. However, the paper argues that in a tougher labour market, generalists with a broad political science background face severe competition from lawyers and economists, and that this must have implications for the direction of research and training in public administration.

## INTRODUCTION

Any discussion of the future of the discipline of Public Administration (PA) in Denmark necessitates a clarification of the historical context in which it developed. It is impossible to discuss and evaluate the evolution, status, problems and prospects of the discipline without broadening the perspective to include the relationship of the discipline to, first, political science, second, to the civil service profession, and third, to the neighbouring social science disciplines of law and economics.

This logic of exposition allows us to isolate some of the characteristics of the Danish disciplines of PA and political science more generally, and to compare them to their sister disciplines in many other countries. This is resoundingly a success story – at least if the yardstick of accomplishments in the expansive public sector is used. However, the durability of this success is by no means a given. There are signs that the accomplishments may be vulnerable, and it is therefore important not only that the comparatively small group of people in public administration take stock, but also that the wider political science community engage in the discussion. This paper argues that up until now, public administration has been the breadwinner of

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Danish political science. If political science wants to consolidate and even improve its competitive standing within the civil service, Danish political science-based public administration must contemplate: (1) its comparative strengths and weaknesses *vis-à-vis* economists and lawyers; and (2) the technical qualifications needed by future civil servants. If political science succeeds in meeting this challenge, political science graduates have extremely good chances of replacing economists as the prime governmental policy analysts. In contrast, if political science misses this opportunity its position remains fragile and dependent on sustained growth in public sector employment.

It will be seen that this presentation and discussion the discipline of PA in Denmark is closely related to a discussion of Danish political science. There are good reasons for this. A basic trait is that PA at three of the five universities (Aarhus, Copenhagen and Odense) is integrated into the discipline of political science. At the remaining two (Aalborg and Roskilde) they have set up more specialized PA programmes, which are embedded in an interdisciplinary social science context. Political science certainly is important here, but none of these universities offer a curriculum covering the entire range of a full-scale political science degree.

### **The cult of the professional generalist**

Danish political science is a fairly young science. In 1959, the University of Aarhus established a Department of Political Science and began training political scientists to the graduate level. In the beginning student enrolment was modest. In 1969, however, the Ministry of Finance hired its first political science graduate and political scientists soon gained a foothold within central government. They then found their way into the services of the local governments that, after local government reform, went through a rapid process of professionalization and bureaucratization.

Since the late 1980s, a few political scientists have been appointed to posts at the top of the civil service. According to recent research, a decade later, political scientists filled almost one-tenth of 142 top positions in central government (Jensen and Olsen 2000, p. 157), with a similar pattern found in local government. Political scientists have during the past decade replaced the once dominant economists and now occupy many managerial positions within the hospital sector. Thus, contrary to experience in several countries, Danish political scientists (like for example their Norwegian, but unlike for example their German colleagues) have well-established career opportunities outside academia (Grønlie 1999, 336 ff.). According to a Danish proverb trees don't grow into heaven, and one explanation for this conspicuous success is incessant public sector growth; another is that economists increasingly found their way into more lucrative careers, in for example, the financial sector.

Still, it remains an open question why this could happen in a country with a civil service modelled on the German civil service. Within this tradition public administration was an extension of the legal system, and a law degree was a prerequisite for a career as a civil servant. But in the 1920s and

1930s developments in the Danish civil service took a different turn as economists were gradually admitted. After a while the concept of a civil service generalist changed from the profile of a highly qualified lawyer to that of a civil servant with some form of social science training. From the 1950s and onwards economists moved into the highest positions within the departments of finance, economics, business and foreign affairs.

With this division of the bureaucratic labour market one might well wonder whether there would be room for a new academic degree within the generalist professions. One risk was that the two already established groups of generalists would be able to close their ranks to intruders and competitors, and if that did not occur, the risk was that the old distinction between a privileged class of generalists and specialists would collapse. But none of these possibilities have materialized. Instead the generalist class has redefined itself as civil servants with degrees in law, economics or political science. This is in sharp contrast to countries like Britain where economists and lawyers are looked upon as specialists, while the archetypical generalist has an arts degree and to Germany where lawyers have upheld their historical status as administrative generalists.

### **The roots of success**

The founding fathers of Danish political science were very much aware of the challenges. Their strategy was to give their students some of the qualifications possessed by lawyers and economists. First, political science students were to acquire qualifications in public law and macro-economics equivalent to those of BAs in respectively law and economics. Second, in contrast to students of economics and law, they were to possess solid and realistic knowledge of public bureaucracy, of public administration as a *political* institution, and of the internal operation and organization of the public sector. Third, the strategy used was to co-opt leading civil servants as external examiners. In this capacity top civil servants got a first-hand impression of the qualifications of political science graduates from Aarhus, and later from Copenhagen and Odense.

This philosophy evidently differs from the rationale of specialized public administration degrees, not to mention professional schools of public administration. The invasion staged by political scientists into central and local government was helped not only by a growing job market, but also by the support of a few influential top civil servants in the 1960s and 1970s. Both they and Poul Meyer, the founder of Danish PA, were convinced that a proper understanding of the organization and operation of public bureaucracy depended on, among other things, a deep understanding of the political setting within which civil servants operate.

### **THE ROLE OF THE POLITICAL SCIENTIST**

A few years ago the late Ombudsman Lars Nordskov Nielsen, himself a professor of public law, asked one of the authors of this paper what, after all,

political scientists can do that people with another training could not. An insidious question like that is perhaps open to ridicule, especially over lunch at a big political science department such as Aarhus. Here self-confidence is high, and the agreed wisdom is that both lawyers and economists are poorly prepared to meet the challenges of this world. However, the question posed by Nielsen deserves an answer: is there anything that political science trained civil servants can do that their law or economics trained competitors cannot do? And further, do lawyers and economists have qualifications that political scientists do not match, and likewise graduates in other disciplines?

When the problem is phrased that way, the competitive position of the political science trained generalist is not especially impressive. The future looks even bleaker when the signs that political scientists are losing ground in the civil service are acknowledged. As noted above, political scientists from the 1970s and onwards were gradually accepted as an integral part of the generalist sector of the civil service. The triumph seemed complete when during the 1990s several posts as permanent secretary and agency director were filled with political scientists. However, recent appointments to the very top positions in central government indicate that political scientists are finding it difficult to defend the conquests made during the previous two decades. In most recent cases, ministers have demonstrated a clear preference for civil servants with either a law or an economics background for appointees who are either to act as their most trusted advisors or as agency directors. There are other, even more ominous signs of an impending crisis. Since 2002 the market for social science graduates has been hit by two adverse developments. The combined effect of a general economic slowdown and a government reallocation of resources is a decrease in demand for civil servants. As a result unemployment among young graduates has increased. A comparison of the unemployment rate for graduates from the first six months of 2001 by 1 April 2002 shows that economists and lawyers fare better than graduates with so-called administrative degrees, including political scientists. However, according to a further breakdown of the numbers, recent graduates from the Aarhus department suffer from a slightly higher rate of unemployment than lawyers, while their fellow graduates from especially the interdisciplinary public administration programmes have an unemployment rate at some 30 per cent. (These figures have been kindly provided by DJØF, The Danish Union of Lawyers and Economists; the Union also organizes political scientists and other social science graduates.)

The pressing issue therefore is whether the seeming success of political scientists has been more due to a long-term expansion of the public sector labour market than to the unique qualifications of political science trained bureaucrats. Or to rephrase the Nordskov Nielsen quote: are there any reasons to believe that a cabinet minister or a mayor should ever choose a political scientist as his right hand man because of his training? If the answer is no, a

minister or a mayor facing the same choice might prefer a right hand man with a background in law or economics.

To answer this intriguing question we shall once again turn to Poul Meyer. As a pioneer in the field he saw public administration as a technique that could be learned through appropriate academic training. In his view there was no difference between the demands confronting the future engineer and those confronting a aspiring civil servant (Meyer 1979). His ideal programme for training civil servants therefore was a combination of training in governmental organization and administrative design as well as the techniques of planning and budgeting, combined with a thorough insight in the politics of public sector governance. In this conception, a solid foundation of public law and economics was another integral part of the qualifications needed by a civil servant. These demands are to be understood in the perspective of the discussions on public sector governance that took place in much of the Western world in the 1960s. If we are to judge their relevance for the future we therefore have to rephrase them in the light of both advances in research and changes in the agenda for public sector governance. When doing so we also have to realize that these advances, changes and discourses are to a great extent subject to the cyclical forces of political and managerial culture (Hood 2000).

In the introduction to this paper we noted that in the original plans for a degree in political science, one key qualification of future graduates was their presumed knowledge of public bureaucracy and the institutions of public sector governance. Another qualification was their training to assess public administrative and policy problems in a broader political perspective. Even if it is debatable to what extent modern political science graduates meet these basic requirements, other social science programmes do not offer these skills to their students. However, it seems equally clear that these qualifications do not suffice to meet the demands of a minister or a mayor. Their requirements are, in contrast, qualifications that are quite easily – and possibly more effectively – acquired through on the job training. Any lawyer or economist who has served in the units in a ministerial department or in the central units of local and regional government may therefore be assumed to possess these skills. Thus, when civil servants become ready for promotion to the very top posts in government, there is no reason for politicians who have the authority to make the appointments to prefer a political scientist to a lawyer or an economist with no academic pre-career training in political analysis.

Political scientists are therefore faced with the problem that the same is not true for either public law or economics. Even if legal and economic concerns play only marginal roles in political and managerial decision-making, politicians in governmental leadership positions must legitimate their decisions in legal and economic terms. Their policy decisions must also be prepared in such a way that they meet certain professional standards; this is especially true concerning the legal aspects of public policy decisions and

for specific cases decided in accordance with the law governing administrative agencies and departments. This has two potentially dangerous implications for the competitive position of political scientists in the public service.

First, political leaders may prefer top civil servants who possess strong formal qualifications to provide, distil and evaluate the substantial legal and economic advice that they require; political scientists rarely possess these qualifications. This is especially true for political scientists trained since the 1990s as the syllabuses for both public law and economics have been reduced within the political science curriculum. Second, in governmental policy-making there is a clear demand for types of legal and economic advice that can only be provided by civil servants who have an adequate level of technical qualifications in these fields. So, it is difficult to draft a legal text without proper legal training, and it is equally difficult to produce a relevant contribution to economic policy-making without, for example, proper training in econometric modelling. These are qualifications that policy-makers expect to be met by generalists serving on their departmental staffs. In consequence, ministers and other top-level policy-makers are inevitably acquainted with junior lawyers and economists; something similar may happen for junior political scientists in government service, but the truth is that political executives tend not to demand their services because of their professional training in political science and public administration.

Still, in public bureaucracy a fair amount of attention, time and resources are spent on organizational issues, reorganizations and self-organization. The related issues of designing mechanisms of governance are equally high on the list of priorities. This, following Meyer's old formulation of PA as a technique, should be the professional nucleus for future political science trained public administrators. First, this is in fact already partly the case; today hardly a single reorganization or institutional design project is initiated that does not involve civil servants who have a political science degree. Second, together with defence and military security, it is the only field where governmental organizations occasionally call upon the services and advice of the academic profession of political science. Third, the political science based branch of modern institutional theory has gained theoretical insights that are relevant to practitioners because they both consider the political constraints within which design problems have to be solved, and are able to span the economic analysis of individual level incentives and the sociological analysis of social and organizational norms. Fourth, neither economists nor lawyers are well-equipped for moving into this field, and organizational sociologists, having gained a reputation as comparative 'softies', have failed to win respect and therefore gain to a foothold within government.

In preparing and improving themselves for this role political scientists might learn from their colleagues in economics. Modern micro-economics, especially industrial economics, has taken up the study of policy problems that are highly relevant for, for example, regulatory policies and

policy-making. Hence many of the changes in competition policy and in the regulation of public utilities would have been unthinkable without these advances in economics. This certainly does not imply that they have been initiated because of them, but rather that they have provided a new mental model for policy-makers, providing a new field of operation for professional economists in government. Further, this role could not be filled by lawyers, and even less so by political science trained analysts of public policy.

### **Facing the demands of the future**

If Danish political science still recognizes that it is important to train graduates who then qualify for generalist careers in government, its faculties have to critically reconsider their market position *vis-à-vis* both economists and lawyers. The first priority might be to upgrade political science students' training in public law and economics. This may prove difficult, however, as government policy has been to reduce the length of academic studies. Danish political science faculties could reduce their scepticism in this regard by considering what their political science colleagues find fully acceptable for acquiring a master's degree in for example Sweden and the Anglo-Saxon countries. Further, when the founding fathers of Danish political science stressed the importance of their students' acquiring more than just basic knowledge of economics, their emphasis was on macro-economics. This should not be the case for future political scientists. Rather, priority in the curriculum should be given to including public sector economics and industrial economics. This would enable political science graduates to match economists as policy-analysts, but in contrast to economists they would combine a command of economic theory and economic policy analysis with insights into the political and institutional constraints of political and administrative decision-making. As it is now, there is – in Niskanen's words – a risk that some politically alert economists might invade the ill-defended premises of political science (see for example Dixit 1998).

Since its early days, Danish political science has had clear empirical ambitions. However, having originated in history and law, priority was given to qualitative research methodologies and to case studies. These techniques have also been prevalent within the discipline of public administration. As advances in computer technology made statistical tools available to political science, one of the more parochial aspects of Danish political science was to primarily see this as a tool to be exploited by academics using survey techniques for studying mass political behaviour. In other fields of political science quantitative techniques were both simple and rarely used. Over time, government – like private business – increasingly demand that employees in executive staff positions command advanced, state-of-the-art statistical techniques. This fact has not been fully acknowledged by political science departments: those who teach quantitative methods and statistics persist in insisting on applying them to the analysis of survey data, while the rest more or less neglect both analytic potential and its market relevance.

Although Danish political science is no exception in this respect, there are good reasons for assigning a higher priority to quantitative research methods, not least on the grounds just mentioned. Jeff Gill and Kenneth J. Meier have convincingly argued that public administration research has fallen behind in terms of methodological sophistication. In a more positive vein they put forward an argument for much more investment in time series analysis and in techniques that facilitate the systematic comparison of, say, agency performance in the light of varying political and environmental constraints. Finally, they argue that in public administration there is a need for developing data sets specifically geared for the analysis of public administration and policy (Gill and Meier 2000).

Gill and Meier claim that American academic public administration lags behind some of its sister disciplines because of its close relations with practitioners within public bureaucracy. Our point is that Danish public administration is at risk *vis-à-vis* the public sector labour market because neither its own academics nor their colleagues in the political science sister disciplines have been sufficiently aware of the extent to which modern analytical techniques are in demand for policy and organizational analysis in government. Therefore, to protect and improve the competitive standing of political scientists within the public sector there is a pressing need to seriously upgrade their quantitative and statistical skills. For students aiming for an academic career within public administration, institutional analysis, public policy and related fields of political science, there is an equally pressing need to upgrade these methodological skills. They are increasingly considered to be state-of-the-art prerequisites for the acceptance of papers for publication in the most respected journals within the profession.

We have so far argued that both lawyers and economists possess competitive advantages when compared with political scientists. This is due to their substantial insights and, for economists, their command of advanced statistical techniques. While the strong position of lawyers within government is well-protected, the same is by no means true for economics graduates. It is entirely possible that modern economics is the most developed and prestigious branch of the social sciences. This is clearly the self-image cultivated by academic economists among themselves, and they have to some extent succeeded in selling this lofty image to political and bureaucratic policy-makers. This image is based on the economic profession's advances in formalizing the analytical problems and theoretical models with which they increasingly work. While this strategy may have been successful in boosting the confidence of members of the profession, it has not been popular with students. Enrolment in the economics programmes at the three Danish traditional universities (Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense) has fallen over the years, and several of them seem to be approaching the brink of crisis (one that is also a financial crisis), something that the leaders of the profession have been extremely slow to face. This is in no way a specifically Danish problem; similar trends are seen in other Western countries.



In a provocative essay, the Swiss economist Bruno Frey (who is also well-known among European political scientists for his public choice analyses of politics and public policy) has gone even further and pointed out that one unintended consequence of the increasing formalization of academic economics is its irrelevance to public policy-making. But Frey does not stop there, as he also ascribes the shrinking popularity of economics among students to its perceived distance from the real world. Thus he reaches the conclusion that 'if economics moves further in the direction of increasing formalization and application to self-defined problems, then the interest in its research and the number of students will continue to decrease. At the universities the number of chairs in economics will be reduced, and economics will probably be transformed into a subsection of applied mathematics.' (Frey 2000; our translation).

If this holds true, and if this phenomenon is also valid for Denmark, and there certainly are indications that this is the case, then new opportunities may open for graduates with a background in political science-based public administration. One reason is that in a few years time the supply of economists will gradually dry up; another is the modern economists' profile as specialists who may fill a few jobs in governmental and financial sectors where, for certain tasks, highly specialized and qualified training in applied mathematical and formal model analysis is needed. But the majority of jobs in the civil service will be open to professional staff who combine theoretical and empirical insights with an up-to-date grasp of quantitative methods.

There is further reason to believe that political science-based public administration may find itself in a favourable competitive situation as compared to modern economists. It is commonplace to acknowledge that administrative and political decisions are made within quite severe political constraints. This simple fact of life is so evident that it does not provide political scientists with a separate platform from which they can out-compete their civil service colleagues with prior training in economics and law. Everyday conditions entail that civil servants easily learn to accommodate through on-the-job training in organizations that have a strong potential for socializing their employees. However, as economics increasingly concentrates on the construction and analysis of formal models, there seems to be a tendency for mainstream economists to neglect the importance of variables that do not fit into the simple image of a utility maximizing agent who reacts on the basis of economic incentives and on his calculations of the balance between costs and benefits. It may well be argued that this kind of simplification is necessary for stringent analysis. On the other hand, such simplifications not only misrepresent the real world, but also divert attention in directions that are of little use to governmental policy-makers and management looking for solutions to real world problems (Miller 2000).

There are two ways in which political science-trained public administrators might enjoy a comparative advantage here. First, their background in political science renders them prepared to include political costs and

benefits into their policy and institutional analysis and the advice they give based on this background. They are aware of the fact that efficiency concerns are of only limited relevance to political decision-makers and to public sector management. If such concerns need to be given more weight in pending decisions, institutional changes may be a prerequisite to the implementation, which will itself involve a proper handling of political costs and benefits. Similarly, incentive analysis of the kind that in several countries seems to lie behind the introduction and implementation of individual contracts and performance-related pay within the public sector is incomplete so long as it does not consider distributional consequences at the intra and interorganizational level. Second, through their academic training, public administrators should also be acquainted with organization theory and sociology, enabling them to consider phenomena such as institutional norms, organizational culture, social exchange relations and agency missions in their analyses, decisions and political advice. While this should come naturally to an empirically minded political scientist, it is foreign to a modern economist whose analysis is based on formal models and stringent, but severely limited deductive reasoning.

### **The PA research community**

Research in public administration in Denmark takes place at all five universities and, to some extent, at the two business schools as well as at the Institute of Local Government Studies, an institution affiliated with the two local government associations. Still, the research community remains small: a handful of people here and there and with a varying number of graduate students. Exactly how many people this adds up to is difficult to say as the frontier to public policy – comparative and Danish politics as well as organization theory – is open. Under these circumstances it is hazardous to come up with definitive characteristics of the local research communities. Given their limited size, they are sensitive not only to minor changes in staff but also to the termination of current research projects and the adoption of new ones. This *caveat* becomes even more important if the characterization is extended into the future.

Still, traditions and inclinations differ. They will be sustained if established path dependencies are reinforced through future recruitment. First, all groups share an empirical ambition, but the topical concentrations reveal some variation; over the years for instance Odense and Roskilde have mainly concentrated on local government and administration and Aarhus and Copenhagen have assigned somewhat more weight to studies of both central and local government. In recent years there has even been a preponderance of local government research in Aarhus, while Copenhagen has recently begun to focus also on the international aspects of public administration. This has changed, however, and in Aarhus new research projects have refocused on central government and taken up research on the EU-dimension and especially on the implementation of EU-policies. Second,

there are observable differences in the choice of methodology. Danish PA research is not very different from research being carried out in other countries that traditionally emphasize studies based on a mixture of qualitative and rather simple quantitative methods. Odense, for example, has a strong tradition of using survey techniques, while both historical data and methods receive much attention in Copenhagen. But times are changing; with Roskilde as the pioneer, some PA-research has taken up discourse analysis, while in Aarhus PA-research increasingly adopts more advanced statistical techniques. Similarly, in Copenhagen much organization level research has been conducted successfully using a combination of anthropological and survey techniques (Jørgensen 2003).

The pattern outlined here is very loosely sketched and requires important qualifications. Over the years much research has been done that does not fit readily into this pattern (Jørgensen 1999). Research also takes place within other departments, demonstrating that none of the PA sub-communities is specialized within a particular field of research. One important illustration of this is the interest in evaluation studies, methods and implementation studies that have been undertaken by people in several departments. Due to individual mobility, research on these topics now also takes place at The Danish National Institute of Social Research. Another illustration is the ongoing research in Aalborg on relations between interest organizations and the administration. Through this research, the Aalborg-group has taken up a topic that in the 1970s led to quite a lot of research in Aarhus, a topic that in recent years has received only scant attention there. But developments continue to be dynamic as new projects are taken up, and scholars in Aarhus have now resumed analysis in the field. It is even more difficult to say anything conclusive about which theoretical schools are preferred, although this was attempted some years ago in order to place each sub-community within distinct analytical approaches (Bogason 2000). Again with a *caveat*, it is correct that more emphasis was placed on rational choice inspired analysis in Aarhus, while people in Copenhagen have found more inspiration in organizational sociology as well as sociological and historical institutionalism. It is equally true that network analysis and governance theory have a stronger following around Roskilde than in other parts of Denmark. But before this can be proclaimed a trend, connecting past, present and future, it is essential to emphasize that within each sub-community much research has been conducted that does not easily fit into approaches and schools, since these are in any case very much creatures of their time. But to extend this somewhat dilapidated pattern into a trend and extrapolate from it into the future would underestimate the sensitivity exhibited by Danish PA scholars to the tides of the real world and to international political science fads and fashions that will undoubtedly impact on Denmark's small national PA community in the future.

With this dynamism the question is what drives the development. One possibility is that it responds to the demands of the administrative and

policy community (Kickert and Vught 1995). Still, this, in the Danish context, is a highly doubtful hypothesis as the public service primarily channels its demands to the social science community through its demand for well-trained civil service recruits. Another is that development and changes in the research agenda is driven by changes in the national and international research community and in the discourse on public sector organization and management. Either factor seems to interact in as far as the research community does not seem immune to the spread of new ideas of administration and governance. The strong interest in planning and planning techniques in the 1970s and early 1980s, a topic gaining no attention at the early twenty-first century, illustrates this point as does the attention given to the New Public Administration by some researchers. By looking at these interacting factors a pattern may be discernible. For the most part this places Aarhus and Odense on the same side. Research topics may change, but they are mostly embedded into a broader political science context. For Copenhagen emphasis on the political science perspective is less clear with somewhat more emphasis given to a separate public administration profile with a certain linkage to organization theory. Developments in Roskilde run partly parallel with the important addition that the systematic coverage of theories of governance has for some time given Roskilde its own distinctive profile.

Another perspective could tentatively be brought to bear on the different milieus. This would, once more, partly set Aarhus and Odense apart as institutions where quantitative techniques and to a certain extent formal modelling are increasingly brought in. To the extent this holds true it underscores the weight the teaching of these techniques is given in preparing political science graduates for a government market where they are in demand and the importance the command of these techniques have in a competitive international research community. The importance of these forces is acknowledged in both curriculum developments and in the relative position of the Danish departments in a global ranking of Danish political science departments. It indicates that even if the profiles of the institutions are in flux, their international standing is highly divergent (Hix 2003).

The research agendas are, as already noted, not immune to changes in normative currents and political-administrative discourse, but the interaction between such changes and the topics actually taken up in the research community seem to some extent to vary with differing local profiles. To take the reaction to the wave of New Public Management as an example. This movement has, as in most other countries, influenced the choice of research topics undertaken by PA-scholars, as can be seen from the interest in contracting out, corporatization and privatization, contractual modes of governance and quasi-market reforms. In all the local milieus the reaction has been critical, but the focus of the critique varies. So, in Copenhagen and Roskilde, where PA-researchers might be inclined to see PA as a separate discipline, focus has been on the possible implications of NPM to the values and ethos of the public service. In Aarhus and Odense, where public

administration is considered one of several sub-fields of political science, the focus has rather been on questioning the political rationale of NPM-reforms, a perspective borne by scepticism as to their actual implementation. This difference in focus has led to very different analyses.

### **Which profession?**

American public administration has in recent years had a debate over the state and the future of the study of public administration which in several ways parallels the one initiated by this journal. In the American case the point of departure is one of considerable frustration. Although public administration was one of the sub-disciplines that originally belonged to the very nucleus of political science, modern public administration has moved to the margins of the academic political science-community. This is not to imply that political science does not show academic interest in the study of public administration, bureaucracy and public policy, but rather that academic study has found its centre of gravity within other political science sub-disciplines such as American and comparative politics, rational choice analysis and institutional analysis. Traditional public administration is still taught, but training and research is concentrated at specialized schools of public administration. These schools bear many of the marks of professional centres of education as they cultivate close contacts to professional public administrators working for government, and they have hence placed themselves and their prospective graduates in a pivotal position when it comes to competing for public sector jobs. This in many ways represents an important achievement, but it may have come at too high a price. Donald F. Kettl has argued 'that in terms of the field's status within the profession, the sense within political science about the field's contribution to the "big questions", and the field's foundation in recognized methods, it is clear that public administration has some distance to go' (Kettl 1998).

In modest comparison, Danish public administration is in a favourable position. It is strongly integrated into the political science profession, and although this may be small consolation, whatever it lacks in methodological sophistication it shares with the rest of the national political science community. Its double strength is that by working in a broader political science community a defence has been established against the full co-optation and absorption of academic public administration by the civil service community, while its graduates have still been able to gain a foothold in public service. One implication is that because of the integration of public administration in political science, public employers accept graduates in political science as applicants, regardless of their individual specialization. Another implication is that through their mandatory preoccupation with such administratively irrelevant topics as political theory and philosophy, they are to some extent vaccinated against undue and early technocratization. Through their broader training within a full political science curriculum, one might even hope that for some years during their 20s, students realize

the potential of political science and public administration as strong platforms for critical analysis of public policy-making and management. Yet given the strong socialization mechanisms that operate in governmental organizations, there is little chance that this critical stance will survive for more than an extremely short while after their entry into the public service. The important thing, however, is that former graduates working for government realize that their former mentors follow their work from afar and never give in to the temptation of just producing recruits who are tailor made for the civil service while still pursuing their university studies. In other words, it is important for Danish political science *cum* public administration never to aspire to establishing a national school of public administration.

As argued above, Danish political science has managed to place its academic offspring on the labour market. This is an important achievement that must be safeguarded in the future. The worst case scenario is one where political science loses ground *vis-à-vis* lawyers and economists because they will then see themselves in the unenviable situation of liberal arts graduates who fight with poor employment prospects, uncertain career opportunities and low salaries. It has also been argued that the competitive position of political science-trained public administrators is not beyond risk since in a different labour market lawyers especially possess qualifications that are attractive to public employers. However, Danish political science graduates are certainly also capable of giving their economist competitors a fight to the very end. The condition for success here is that Danish political science in general, and public administration in particular, realizes both its potential and its weaknesses. The latter are most important and will necessitate both an upgrading of graduates' command of proper quantitative methods, discussions concerning the balance between the different political science subfields and a renewed openness to accepting the legal and economic contributions that may pave the way for government service at the highest and most qualified levels.

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