

Comparative Analysis of State Administrations: The Size of State as an Independent Variable

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on the institutional structure of public administration. A comparative analysis of administrative structures and their functioning helps to explain the processes of public policy-making and implementation both on the national and international levels. Although the number of cross-national studies is growing, there is little research adopting the size of a state as a possible variable. To fill in this gap, the paper aims to explore how the size of a state can influence its institutional structure and politico-administrative behavior by looking into the literature that can be assembled under the label of "small state studies". It is concluded that there seems to be support for the idea of "the continuum of size", and five traits of smaller state administrations can be brought out. These are limited scope of activity, multi-functionalism, reliance on informal structures, constraints on steering and control, and high personalism. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Key Words: comparative public administration, small states, administrative structure.

1. Introduction

In a recent lecture held at Tallinn University of Technology, an Estonian ex-minister of Social Affairs recalled that he was a kind of super-minister when meeting with his colleagues in Europe as the same area of responsibility (health, labor, pensions, social security, family, equal opportunities) was usually covered by three different ministers in other states. Within the same series of lectures, the top executive of a government foundation responsible for advancing Estonian economic development made an observation that he did not know any partner organization in other European countries that would have covered so many economic sectors and fields (besides industrial development also foreign investment, tourism, regional development and civil society). Both executives related such multi-functionality to the small size of the Estonian state and its limited resources.

The previous examples allow one to hypothesize that administrative structures in a small country can be expected to differ from administrative structures in a large

country. That would be an important finding as institutional structure has a major impact on a state's performance. For comprehending the processes of public policy-making and implementation in a particular country, it is important to analyze the way the respective political-administrative system is organized, how it is structured and how it functions. Those participating in the policy processes act on behalf of formal organizations. The organizational forms and their modes of operation create constraints and possibilities on actors' use of discretion and as a result affect both the content of public policies and the ways these are implemented (Christensen et al. 2007).

Nevertheless, the size of states is a rare variable in institutional analysis and comparative public administration, which usually try to find explanatory factors from the political system, the politico-administrative culture, task characteristics or internationally rationalized management recipes. To fill in this gap, the aim of the paper at hand is to explore how the size of a state can influence its institutional structure and politico-administrative behavior, whether there are absolute values from which on the size starts to be relevant and what implications this could all have for the international comparative research on public administration. For finding answers to these questions, the literature that can be assembled under the label of "small state studies" is examined.

2. Theory on small states

A researcher committed to the aim of finding out how the size of a state can influence its institutional structure finds out quickly that "small" is a very relative concept. It depends on the perspective and the other side of the comparison. There are studies on "small" states like the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria or Finland that can be characterized small in the context of Europe, especially in the European Union before the last big enlargement (see e.g. Katzenstein 1985; Thorhallsson 2000; Kickert 2002; Tiilikainen 2006). On the other hand, there is quite a voluminous literature on small island states, mostly in the Caribbean and the South Pacific, the majority of which can be characterized not simply as small but as microstates (e.g. Bray and Packer 1993; Sutton 2006; Sutton and Payne 1993; Commonwealth Secretariat 1987).

In this context, it is not surprising that almost every discussion on small states starts with the issue of definition. From the perspective of political science, there are basically two streams in the studies, the first focusing on small-state behavior in the international arena (see Ingebritsen et al. 2006 for a collection of influential texts) and the other on their special constraints and advantages in maintaining statehood at home (e.g. Baker 1992a). Respectively, these research streams rely on different definitions. The interest of scholars of international relations is mainly in small states as "small powers", defining them through simple negation (those states that are not great powers), in terms of capabilities (limited possession of power resources, e.g. population, area or GDP) or in relative terms (those states that are not able to change the present power configuration and conditions for policy-making on international level) (Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006; Neumann and Gstöhl 2006). The focus on small states as small powers allows for a very flexible approach to the countries being studied, making "small" dependent on the other part in the comparison or even

possibly equal to “weak”. Although small states’ behavior on the international level could be expected to also be influenced by institutional configuration at home, there is surprisingly little research on that. Of the few examples, Neumann and Gstöhl (2006, 11-12) refer to East (1973), whose research on foreign policy rejected the assumption that small-state behavior is the result of the same general processes of decision-making that are found in larger states. Instead, different institutional solutions for carrying out foreign policy were found.

The second perspective concentrating on the issues of statehood is usually engaged in finding more absolute criteria for defining “small”. The focus being on the question of when the scale makes a difference? The most wide-spread criterion chosen within this stream is the size of a state’s population (see e.g. Baker 1992a; Randma-Liiv 2002). Small states have most commonly been defined as those states with a population of 1 million or less (Raadschelders 1992, 27). Recent studies by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank have employed the boundary of 1.5 million (Crowards 2002, 145). There are also attempts to give more objective categorizations of states by combining population with other characteristics like area and GDP (see Crowards 2002). A few studies have set the cut-off point higher, e.g. to 3 million people (Armstrong et al. 1998, referred to in Crowards 2002, 145).

However, every such definition is arbitrary. Small states are characterized by enormous diversity (Baker 1992b, 5) and thanks to the “combinatory complexity” (Nielsen 1999, referred to in Pirota et al. 2001, 155), it is very difficult to say what function the size exactly has. The picture is complicated by other variables such as culture, geographical location, area, wealth, historical background and institutional fidelity (e.g. Bray and Packer 1993, 231; Sutton 1987). Furthermore, most of the states analyzed within the second stream are not only small but also developing which brings in special problems of public management and institutional performance (see e.g. Randma, 2001).

Although these reservations are recognized by the students of small-country statehood, they still share the standpoint that the scale does make a difference¹. Bray and Packer (1993, 37) argue that although small states are very different, it is possible to identify some common political, economic and social patterns. Raadschelders (1992, 28) refers to the seminal study by UN Secretariat (1971), which found that small states had several common administrative problems which were aggravated by their size. It follows from this perspective that small states are likely to present some common institutional characteristics regardless of their other traits. Although the view of what is a “small state” is quite different within the international relations perspective, there is a common understanding there, too, that the scale matters.

It was argued above that within the stream of international relations, there are very few studies that would approach the states’ foreign-policy behavior through their domestic institutional structure. Nevertheless, there is a highly interesting book by Thorhallsson (2000) on small states in the EU that offers some insight in that

¹ See e.g. Pirota et al. 2001, 155; Bray and Packer 1993, 230; Raadschelders 1992, 32; Farrugia 1993; Randma-Liiv 2002.

respect. Thorhallsson is led by the question of whether the small size of an administration affects the state's behavior in the decision-making process of the EU and if so what distinguishes it from the behavior of larger states. He compares seven smaller EU states (Denmark, Ireland, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) with five larger states (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy) based on a research framework that seeks to analyze whether the special characteristics of smaller states brought out by Katzenstein (1985; strong corporatism and concentrated economic interests) influence their approach in the decision-making process of the EU in the areas of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Regional Policy. Thorhallsson comes to the conclusion that a new variable – the size of the state's administration and its characteristics – should be taken into account:

The characteristics of the administrations of the smaller states are key factors in explaining how smaller states operate in the decision-making processes in the CAP and the Regional Policy. These features are in contrast to the characteristics of the administrations of the larger states and their EU working procedure ... (Thorhallsson 2000, 221).

It follows that there seem to be special administrative characteristics both when the focus is on small states as a rather restricted category and when the focus is on states that are small or distinctively smaller in comparison to large states. The conclusion supports those who claim that it makes sense to conceptualize "a continuum of size" (e.g. Bray 1991, 13; Bray and Packer 1993, 91). In that view, the states can be expected to have certain characteristics or to present specific behavioral patterns the more one goes down the scale (size of population being the criterion). Small island states could then be treated as a kind of laboratories of smallness representing the specific traits in their full character. In the next section possible administrative traits of smaller states are discussed in more detail.

3. The impact of size on public administration

Farrugia (1993, 221) claims that it is important to understand that senior officials in small states work under conditions which are significantly different from those of their colleagues in larger states, even if their official titles and duties appear identical. According to Thorhallsson's (2000) study, the same appears to be true for smaller states in the EU (which would be categorized as large states by many small state scholars). Based on the available literature, the size can be expected to influence public administration mostly through two mechanisms: first, through the limited availability of resources, most of all human capital, and secondly, through special social ecology.

Population is deemed to be the most relevant indicator for small-state administrations (Baker 1992b, 11-15; Raadschelders 1992, 28-29). Small population means a small number of actors involved in administration, limited possibilities for specialization and a limited pool of skilled persons to perform indispensable roles in the public service. The small size of the social field is expected to lead to a particular

social ecology composed of a closely knit community with highly personalized relationships (Farrugia 1993, 221).

Related to these two mechanisms, five traits of smaller states can be brought out based on the discussion in the literature. These five traits are: limited scope of activity, multi-functionalism, reliance on informal structures, constraints on steering and control, and higher personalism.

3.1 Limited scope of activity

The burden of independent statehood is much higher for small states than larger ones. There are certain functions that a state has to fulfill regardless of its size, from maintaining an education system to defending its interests on the international level (Baker 1992b, 7). Lowenthal (1987, 37) claims that small-state governments are both meddlesome and burdensome. Comparatively they must mobilize more administrative resources to deal with public problems. It may influence both the scope of tasks undertaken and the content of policy choices.

For instance, Bray (1991) has found in his study of the Ministries of Education in small states that there is strong pressure to prioritize. In light of the limited resources, the tasks cannot be dealt with in as much depth as would be desirable and with regard to certain functions, a decision has to be made not to undertake them at all (Bray 1991, 42-49). Often these decisions have to be taken in the face of pressure to establish organization structures comparable to large states (Raadschelders 1992, 28)². However, in a small state, every decision to promote activities in the public sector addresses the fine tradeoff between public-service excellence and competition for scarce resources with private enterprises (Warrington 1992, 229). With regard to the content of policies, sometimes the question is whether to undertake certain functions nationally or to buy them from abroad, e.g. education of certain rare specialists (Bray and Packer 1993, 49; Baker 1992b, 17).

The pressure to prioritize and the need to be very conscious about one's aims are similarly emphasized in the stream of studies focusing on small states' behavior on the international level. In practice, these express themselves in a limited number of goals pursued and a higher degree of activity in the spheres of vital interest. For example, Thorhallsson (2000, 91-93) found that if an issue discussed on the EU level is not of vital importance, a small state will give its officials some room for maneuver. Strict instructions are given in negotiations which concern the state's primary interests. This differs from the behavior of larger states that provide their negotiators with strict guidelines on all occasions. Hay (2002) argues that the limited scope of Luxembourg's foreign policy goals can be explained by the size of the state. The small size acts as a hindrance to Luxembourg's foreign-policy capabilities, and therefore only a careful selection of the most important goals is promoted.

² E.g. Baldursson (2000) brings an example of the Council of Europe's pressure to Iceland to follow the rule that women and young prisoners should be kept in separate prisons. However, this would be quite difficult to implement in a country where there is an average number of 4-6 female prisoners and 0-2 juvenile prisoners at any given time.

3.2 Multi-functionalism

The small size of states limits specialization and pressures public institutions towards multi-functionalism (Farrugia and Attard 1989; Bray and Packer 1993; Randma-Liiv 2002). It appears both on the level of individual officials as well as entire public organizations. According to Farrugia (1993), it is usual for one senior small-state official to be responsible for several sectors, which in larger countries are catered for by separate units. They have to act at the same time as top administrative executives as well as leading professionals in their particular fields. Public servants have to cope with multi-grade and multi-disciplinary duties (Randma-Liiv 2002, 377). Small states also tend to have more multi-functional ministries, as the grouping of functions gives them an advantage of scale as it provides internal access to a wider range of skills and permits more efficient use of resources (e.g. technical support staff) (Bray 1991, 40-41).

The tendency towards multi-functionalism has also been noted in the studies on small-state foreign policy. Thorhallsson (2000, 81) found that Permanent Representatives (PR) from smaller states cover more subjects within the EU than PRs from large states. They tend to be generalists rather than specialists and do not have time to specialize in particular policy fields as they have to deal with a greater variety of subjects. Furthermore, in the smaller member states, there is often no clear-cut division between policy formation and implementation, as the same officials are responsible both for negotiating directives in the Council and incorporating these into law. In the larger states, on the contrary, negotiations are exclusively in the hands of policy experts and implementation is a responsibility of particular officials (ibid., 99). Hay (2002, 220) brings out that Luxembourg's wide coverage of countries with diplomatic relationships is achieved through unusually broad portfolios of its Foreign Service officers. Although a wealthy country, the number of bureaucrats that can be devoted to foreign policy is still limited.

Such multi-functionalism has a further aspect. As put forward by Farrugia (1993, 222) "in small states it is simply essential for many people to be multi-functional and that includes mixing politics with the bureaucracy as much as it includes mixing other functions". I.e. the politics-administration dichotomy is even more difficult to maintain in smaller states than in large ones. More tolerance towards movement between the administrative and political spheres can be expected and also more of such mobility in practice (Randma-Liiv 2002; see also Hay 2002, 221; Kersell 1992, 290; Sikk 2006). As will be discussed in the following sections, in smaller states the bureaucrats can also be expected to be more influential policy-makers than their colleagues in larger states. That contributes further to the blurring of lines between administering and political decision-making.

3.3 Reliance on informal structures

Related to the constraints on undertaking a wide scope of public tasks and the need to cope with multiple functions, small-state administrations tend to rely more on flexible and informal structures in their work than larger states. The interaction between units is characterized by the lack of machinery for formal coordination and

heavier reliance on informal means of communication (Raadschelders 1992, 28). The small-state tendency to adapt structures and jobs to people rather than to fit individuals into formal organizational frameworks (Randma-Liiv 2002, 380) challenges the instrumental perspective of organization structure, which sees the norms for practices as something that exist independently of the personal characteristics of the individual holding a position (Christensen et al., 2007, 24). In smaller states, it is more difficult to apply hierarchical and strictly routine-based organization structures.

The higher informality of the working procedures is also one of the most important findings by Thorhallsson (2000, 85-90). In fact, according to him, the adoption of a flexible strategy and informal working procedures is the central mechanism that allows smaller states to cope with the increasing demands of the EU decision-making process. Thorhallsson found that in the smaller states, the direct channels of consultation and information between Permanent Representatives in Brussels and their national officials in ministries are more often on an informal basis than in the large-state administrations. Furthermore, individual officials and administrative units use their basic knowledge of what scope they have for action and what is expected of them, therefore not needing to ask mandate for every issue that comes up.

3.4 Constraints on steering and control

Warrington (1992, 228) argues that genuinely independent scrutiny of administrative processes is perhaps the most elusive goal in small states. He relates the problem to intense partisanship in political activity. However, the same issue is also brought up by other researchers, mostly in connection to the management of specialist knowledge (e.g. Randma-Liiv 2002; Bray and Packer 1993; Farrugia 1993). The institutionalization of control mechanisms demands resources prescribed for that task as well as expert knowledge. Smaller states tend to be constrained in both. As argued above, the smaller scale of a state sets limits on specialization. This applies to organizations as well as individuals and, besides multi-functionalism, it leads to the accumulation of specialist knowledge to a limited number of positions and individuals. Furthermore, constraints on resources may not allow dealing with this information asymmetry that appears in the system in ways that could be desired. For instance, several authors (e.g. Randma-Liiv 2002; Bray and Packer 1993; Farrugia 1993) argue that in small states it is possible for a person to define the post, rather than the reverse. Among other reasons, it is related to the lack of specialists to draw up specialist job descriptions. The same can be extended to the organizational level and drawing up regulations for specialized agencies.

Different configurations of steering and control have also been found in comparing the working procedures of smaller and larger EU member states. According to the study by Thorhallsson (2000, 82-84), both the Permanent Representatives of smaller states and senior officials in their domestic ministries have considerably more autonomy in handling EU issues than the officials of larger states. Smaller-state officials could often decide on their own how to proceed with problems at hand while officials of larger states always had specific guidelines for action. The ministers of smaller states limited their involvement to only highly politicized matters.

Thorhallsson (2000, 85-86) relates this autonomy to trust that is built not only on the small size of the administrations and resulting close relationships, but also upon a network of officials with a similar background, education and views.

However, there may also be more practical reasons for such autonomy. As smaller states tend to have smaller organizations dealing with specific public problems, they have to rely more on individual expertise. When many intervening management levels are missing, problematic issues will reach quickly to the very top (Bray 1991, 16). Therefore, there is an incentive built into the small systems to trust the competence of individual officials and units.

3.5 Higher personalism

A central finding of small-state studies is that these states are characterized by a particular social ecology, one aspect of which is a web of highly personalized relationships (Farrugia 1993, 221). A classical text by Benedict (1966) maintains that the criteria of scale for a society are the number and quality of role-relationships. If the social field is small, then many roles have to be played by relatively few individuals. That leads to particularistic social relations which extend over a considerable time-span and are affectively charged. I.e. another person's activities and performance are not evaluated on some more or less fixed general criteria, but on *who* he or she is. Lowenthal (1987, 35) characterizes small state relationships with the term "managed intimacy" – as their inhabitants meet over a long period of time in different role-relationships, they must get along with one another.

From the perspective of public administration, a combination of close social relationships and limited resources can be expected to lead to some specific traits and behavioral patterns. First of all, public officials have to operate professionally within a network of people with whom they are personally acquainted, related or connected. The separation of different roles (e.g. an auditor, a friend from university days and a co-member of the children's school board) may be difficult or even unrealistic (Baker 1992b, 18). On the other hand, close social relationships mean, that there is usually less distance between executives and lower levels of organizations. This direct access to the top is one of the factors that make the EU decision-making process in the smaller member states much smoother and quicker (Thorhallsson 2000, 82-83).

A further characteristic of smaller states is that their civil servants can be more influential policy-makers than their colleagues in larger states. Those who work in a small system are in a position to influence it directly, both for the good and the bad. A less institutionalized system allows for a higher degree of personal intervention and a corresponding *ad-hoc* approach to issues (Sutton 1987). On the other hand, small-state officials are more easily personally identified with specific decisions and their consequences. That may put great personal pressure on them and lead to avoidance of decision-making (ibid.). Finally, the higher importance of single officials in co-effect with the small pool of skilled people and specialist knowledge leads to high sensitivity of organizations to workforce mobility. An individual decision to change one's career may result in an enormous dislocation of institutional expertise and even a systemic crisis (Baker 1992b, 15-16).

4. Implications for comparative research

It was found in the previous sections that five traits can be expected to influence policy-making in the smaller states. These traits were: a limited scope of activity, a tendency towards multi-functionalism, reliance on informal structures, constraints on steering and control, and higher personalism. The analysis of the statehood and social ecology of smaller states has led several small-state scholars to the conclusion that concepts and practices prescribed by conventional public administration theory and exemplified by the Weberian bureaucratic organization have to be adapted in the small-state context (Baker 1992b; Bray and Packer 1993; Randma-Liiv 2002; see also Kersell 1992, Warrinton 1992). A Weberian bureaucracy marked by hierarchy, division of labor and routines (Christensen et al., 24) appears difficult to apply in systems that are characterized by horizontal informal relations, multi-functional jobs and a strongly felt need for flexibility.

A number of further implications for comparative research on public administration and public policy-making can be brought out based on the previous discussion. In their essence, these are theoretical or constructive claims that need to be verified by empirical studies as the research on administrative structures from the perspective of countries' size and its impact is very little so far.

- 1) There seem to be administrative traits more characteristic to smaller states both when the focus is on small states as a restricted category (e.g. with a population under 1.5 million) and when the focus is on states that are small in comparison to large states (e.g. smaller states in the EU). The conclusion supports those who claim that it makes sense to conceptualize "a continuum of size". In that view, the states can be expected to have certain characteristics or to present specific behavioral patterns the more one goes down the scale.
- 2) The perceived resource constraint on small administrations and the following tendency of public organizations to be more multi-functional than their counterparts in large states leads to several interesting issues. Christensen et al. (2007) bring out multi-functionality as one of the main differentiating factors between public and private organizations. For them, it manifests in coping with partly conflicting considerations, such as "political steering, control, representation and participation by affected parties, co-determination of employees, sensitivity vis-à-vis users, transparency, publicity and insight into decision-making processes, predictability, equal treatment, impartiality, neutrality, quality of services, professional independence, political loyalty, efficiency and effectiveness" (ibid., 7). From that perspective, the public organizations of smaller states can be characterized as "double multi-functional". Besides coping with competing considerations, they also tend to cover several policy areas and/or embrace different activities (e.g. service delivery, regulation, policy advice, research etc. See Bouckaert and Peters 2004 for a categorization). It can be expected to influence their autonomy and performance in the policy-making process. If multi-functional organizations give civil servants opportunities for discretionary judgment and a degree of freedom in assessing what considerations to emphasize (Christensen et al. 2007, 7), then double multi-functionality could increase this room for

maneuver even bigger. What impact could it have in combination with the general tendency of small-state civil servants' having more discretion due to informal structures and constraints on steering and control?

- 3) A number of issues arise if one combines the small-state tendency towards multi-functionalism with the international trend of "agencification" (see Talbot 2004). The creation of agency-type organizations is in its essence an attempt to clarify the link between tasks and roles on the one hand and formal organization structure on the other. "The ideal seems to be to set up one organization for each task" (Christensen et al. 2007, 16). However, the smallness of small states limits specialization. There is a potential conflict between small-state characteristics and the international vogue. Therefore, it would be relevant to analyze the existence and performance of agency-type units from the perspective of a state's size and to see how the recent idea of autonomous agencies has been translated to the national contexts. Is there any function for the size of the state?
- 4) If agencies form an important part of small-state administration (and often they do), then issues of autonomy and performance rise. First, the necessity of sharing time and attention as well as the need to develop adequate levels of knowledge and skills simultaneously in various areas tends to weaken the expertise of the multi-functional officials (Farrugia 1993). Second, vertical specialization diminishes the potential for political steering and control (Egeberg 1999, 166). In the small-state context, this will be amplified by constraints on resources that can be used for steering as well as by the potential lack of specialist knowledge to effectively control the subordinate units. Furthermore, as relationships within small administrations tend to be characterized by higher personalism and informality, the institutionalization of neutral control mechanisms by the supervising unit may be disturbed. Besides increasing the autonomy of agencies, the difficulties of control by the parent ministry may leave more room for it to other stakeholders, e.g. interest groups. The small-state trait of higher personalism will also give a different flavor to that issue as well as to the issue of trust within administration and in the relationships between administration and society.
- 5) The environment of public organizations in smaller states deserves further attention. Policy output normally reflects the interaction between government bureaucracies and several other institutions and organizations (Egeberg 1999, 161). From the perspective of small-state administration-stakeholder relations, it may appear that there is both a high impact of interest groups on policy-making, especially if there are few strong industrial sectors in the country, and no capable partners in the society to cooperate with. There is a tendency for government to be much more dominant in small than in medium-sized and large states (Bray 1991). That and the limited possibilities for specialization also in the market and society may constrain the development of capable and motivated partners in the private or the third sectors.
- 6) The institutionalization of organizational environment in smaller states may differ also by its ingrained values. There are several references in the literature to the special socio-cultural traits of small states. E.g. Lowenthal (1987)

maintains that besides managed intimacy, there are two more clusters of traits that tend to feature small states: conservatism and adherence to tradition, and a pervasive concern with autonomy. As the social and economic fabrics of small states tends to be more fragile than in larger states and their inhabitants share a common sense of vulnerability, risky and innovative decisions may meet with profound distrust. That, in combination with the personification of decisions, may lead to the avoidance of decision-making. In addition, people in smaller states zealously guard their statehood, and generally there is a strong sense of national and cultural identity (Sutton 1987, 18-19; Bray 1991). The latter is likely to affect the content of political choices (e.g. see the discussion of language policy in Iceland, Corgan 2004).

- 7) Egeberg (1999) brings out that those who focus on formal administrative structures do not necessarily figure out in what ways alternative arrangements might intervene in the policy processes and ultimately shape policy outputs. This claim seems to be even more relevant in the context of smaller states that are characterized by a reliance on informal working procedures and high personalism. The five traits of smaller states all point towards bounded rationality and the probability that the *logic of appropriateness* has bigger explanatory power in the smallstate context than the *logic of consequence*. Therefore, in analyzing public administration and policy-making in smaller states, due respect has to be given to values, informal structures and personalities.
- 8) The high degree of interpersonal communication and informality can be expected to have a strong impact on policy processes, both positive and negative. Factors that may facilitate cooperation may also obstruct and complicate it. Ideas and standpoints can be communicated more easily and quickly. In case of effective feedback mechanisms, policies and decisions can be revised in short time. However, necessary decisions and actions can simultaneously also be modified, adjusted and sometimes totally neutralized by personal interventions and community pressures (Farrugia 1993, 222-223). There is also the threat that disagreement on one issue may not extend only to related matters but also to totally unrelated issues (ibid.). Differences in personality may produce conflicts which are not easy to solve in small organizations and which may lead to considerable consumption of energy and time (Bray 1991, 26). Coordination and communication problems are more probable to occur because of a heavier reliance on informal means of communication and the weaker machinery for formal coordination.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to explore how the size of a state can influence its institutional structure and politico-administrative behavior, whether there are absolute values from which on the size starts to be relevant and what implications all this can have for the international comparative research on public administration. In order to find answers to these questions, the research on small states was studied. The literature review shows that “small” is a very relative concept, depending on the perspective and the other side in the comparison. Nevertheless, there seems to be evidence

to talk about a continuum of size. In that view, the states can be expected to have certain characteristics or to present specific behavioral patterns the more one goes down the scale (size of population being the criterion).

Based on the discussion in small-state studies, it was argued above that regardless of the “combinatory complexity” involved, size can be expected to influence public administration mostly through two mechanisms: first, through the limited availability of resources, most of all human capital, and secondly, through special social ecology. Related to these two mechanisms, five traits of smaller states can be brought out: limited scope of activity, multi-functionalism, reliance on informal structures, constraints on steering and control, and high personalism. Combined with organization theory and topical issues in public administration research, these traits lead to several theoretical observations that could inform further comparative research in public organizations, their structure, autonomy and performance.

The review of literature on small states showed that although there is a shared feeling that the scale makes a difference, there is actually very little information on the potential relationship between the size of a state and the operation of its administrative structures. Empirical research is almost non-existent, especially on small economically developed democratic states. Although it will not be easy to isolate the impact of size from other independent variables at play, there is reason to look more into it through comparative international research to test and develop the explanatory power of the arguments presented above.

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