

Agile Stability: Relaunching *Halduskultuur* – The Estonian Journal of Administrative Culture and Digital Governance

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“The new issue of *Administrative Culture* you are holding in your hand, dear reader”, would be a wrong opening to this introduction of the relaunch of our journal – unless you printed it out, and why would you, there is nothing to hold anymore, except the gadget on which you are reading this. Moreover, what used to be *Administrative Culture* for a while is called *Halduskultuur* again (the same meaning, but in Estonian), yet with a new subtitle that indicates also a new, or broadened, direction: *The Estonian Journal of Administrative Culture and Digital Governance*.

Started as the Estonian-language proceedings for the – now dormant – conference series of the same name when Tallinn Technological University branched into Public Administration as a scholarly discipline soon after the regaining of Estonian independence, *Halduskultuur* was revamped into an international, primarily English, peer-reviewed journal in 2003, when Professor Rainer Kattel (now University College London), hired from the University of Tartu to build up a genuine Public Administration department, took over as editor-in-chief. Under his leadership, *Halduskultuur* also emphasized beauty and formal quality on the outside, if you will – what a waste it was to have ugly journals with bad layout! *HK* was well-designed, with high-quality paper and a small Kafka drawing on the cover; more like a French philosophy journal.

The third iteration came when I took over as editor-in-chief, and at that time, the journal was already successful, certainly regionally – it had become one of the three or four leading PA journals in the former Second World (if by that we mean the former Soviet Union and its satellites, not including China), both by reputation and by the indicators that arose during that time, such as impact factor and especially the Google-based h-index.

But against such indicator-driven self-conceptualization, what was special about *HK* is that it was *consciously second-tier* in order to provide a platform to less formal(ized) papers. PA went and still goes through a phase of formalization and quantitative analysis that, e.g., Public Policy has left behind right now, and we thought, guided by the name, that *Halduskultuur* would offer space for articles that don’t fit the method-driven self-referentiality that was needed to be published in the mainstream places. It was very enjoyable to shock colleagues by telling them that in *HK*, *method was not needed*, and that one could publish Geertzian thick narrations just like that (of course that’s a legitimate method, too).

Yet, this never happened – not once. While I still believe that going consciously for second tier (which almost all PA journals are, anyway – if that) was a brilliant strategy and that much of the best pieces in *HK* are there because of that, in the end, we are so trained, or even “drilled”, in PA that the famous narrated case study was never submitted. But methodologically more mainstream (if emphasizing some degree of narrativity and English prose quality), what *HK* did was that contents-wise it offered a shelter for PA scholarship less mainstream and fashion-oriented – with giving space, e.g., to Non-Western, especially Islamic, PA and very much to Weberian and Neo-Weberian papers. In fact, despite the few papers of Islamic PA published in *HK*, given the small number of such pieces to begin with, it has become one of the main outlets for a topic that, in spite of the hard work of the global-Western and/or anti-Islamic crowd, will not go away. As regards the non- and even anti-NPM thrust, it is fair to say that during the last decade and a half, the mainstream has caught up with us.

But a certain greater mainstreaming than originally intended did happen. We are in a nice set of citation indicators, including *Scopus*, and that happened much to our surprise – but as an outlet for junior members, from PhD student up, to senior ones of our department, and given the profession's and especially Estonia's worship of indicators and rankings, the status to be in the top tier of Estonian publications – the famous ETIS 1.1. category – was helpful both to attract authors and to continue to receive funding from the department and higher university bodies.

A symptom of this mainstreaming was that the editors decided, after some discussion, to change the title of the journal from *Halduskultuur* to *Administrative Culture*, but that was just a mistake. Sociologically, it never happened anyway – the wishy-washy English title was never used internally, everyone still referred to *HK*; and the international “*HK* family” regretted the change, complaining about the old, catchy name being gone. It is, as you can see, back now.

But the current change is more than a labeling exercise – as in any decent innovation policy measure, it is premised on agile stability, i.e. it is an overall overhaul with the purpose to, Lampedusa-like, change everything in order to stay the same, the same in the sense of a decent, useful PA journal. It's not the 90s of the last century anymore (not exclusively a good thing, but things are as they are), but also not 2005. Printed journals are still held up as the gold standard, but more and more, what matters are citations, and anyway the printed copies of journal issues are wastepaper from the start. As the old anecdote goes,

Mrs M. comes to the bookseller and publisher Noah G. Elwert's shop and asks, “Do you have any wastepaper to wrap fish in?” Elwert replies, “Not right now, but I'm just printing a new Bible commentary by Professor X, so very soon I will again.”

People want pdf's, and pdf's only; nobody wants printed journal issues anymore. It's a storage, access, and search question – and to steal money from the public again by charging for expensive subscriptions makes, for a year or two or three more, sense for predatory, locust publishers but not for an in-house journal that is basically financed by grant. So, we needed to go open-access (for citations and ethics) and fully online (ecologically, pragmatically, and not to waste money), and we could then also restore the old title.

But digitization and digitalization (and to some extent, contrary to e-Governance, even digital transformation) don't only concern the medium, but also the message. The Ragnar Nurkse Department itself moved decisively away from PA-only by becoming the Estonian, and indeed Baltic, hub for Innovation Policy studies first – something reflected in other departmental publications, not here. And then, in line with outside interest, if you will *demand*, it also refocused, as a third large element of emphasis, on said e-Gov, now Digital Governance, which is what everyone wanted and expected. We first created a professorship (from our own revenues), later transformed into a chair; from the beginning, this initiative was given to, and led, by Robert Krimmer, one of our PhD's in the field, with a strong publishing and policy record. And contrary to the Innovation side, with the *Halduskultuur* transformation, discussions among the editorial board, department members, and the advisory board, it was clear that the inclusion of the digital side of our research was both necessary and beneficial.

So, altogether, we needed to change the name back; put the journal openly and freely online; add a focus on e-Government; and retain the old methodological and area emphases that had been so successful. In addition, it was clear that this created the necessity, and chance, to restructure both the editorial team and the Advisory Board – as should happen periodically anyway, but not so much. *HK* has been blessed by a world-class AB from the beginning of my takeover as editor-in-chief at the latest, but we were fortunate that this change was universally taken up with enthusiasm, and we have a genuine “dream team” of additional AB members who reflect PA and eGov – and who also broaden the scope from a decidedly European club (plus the United States) to more Non-Western, and especially Asian, representation, in line with our interests and research areas. Given the Estonian country emphasis we also had, and seeing what kind of positive label the “brand” had become, we also decided to include the national name into the title, and here we are now:

Halduskultuur – The Estonian Journal of Administrative Culture and Digital Governance.

We will of course keep the professional editing and layouting we are known for, and we have already internally upgraded the website and its architecture, thanks to our current Managing Editor, Shobhit Shakya, Junior Research Fellow at the Nurkse Department, who has an excellent IT and eGov background. The designer will change, but Ingbert Edenhofer will continue his tenure as language editor, assuring as he always does the highest standards of quality in his realm.

As regards the editorial board itself, after many years of service, and orchestrating their many duties in this and other realms, Tiina Randma-Liiv (Tallinn University of Technology) and Marleen Brans (Leuven) decided to retire, but they graciously consented to join the Advisory Board, so that their knowledge and advice will still be available for us. Professor Robert Krimmer almost automatically joined in order to oversee his sphere, and its establishment, at *Halduskultuur* as well. Together with myself as editor-in-chief, Veiko Lember (*pro tempore* Catholic University of Leuven, the former managing director of *HK* during the times when it was transformed into a global-level publication) and Eugenie Samier (University of Strathclyde) remain on board in every sense of the word.

If there is a change, sadly we have to witness some of our friends and supporters on the Advisory boards leave, *turnusgemäß*, as the German word has it, and we would very much like to thank them for their help, participation, and advice. They are

- Jörg Bogumil, Ruhr-University Bochum
- Fenwick E. English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Agustin Ferraro, University of Salamanca
- Isabella Proeller, University of Potsdam
- Harald Sætren, University of Bergen
- Markku Temmes, University of Helsinki
- Frédéric Varone, University of Geneva

But we would also like to thank the Advisory Board remainers, those who gracefully consented to stay with us and continue their important work, just as much:

- Pertti Ahonen, University of Helsinki
- Geert Bouckaert, Catholic University of Leuven
- György Jenei, Corvinus University of Budapest
- Christoph Knill, University of Munich
- Vitalis Nakrošis, University of Vilnius
- Edoardo Ongaro, The Open University, UK
- B. Guy Peters, University of Pittsburgh
- Martin Potůček, Charles University in Prague
- Baldur Thorhallsson, University of Iceland
- Mirko Vintar, University of Ljubljana

Having thanked those those who left and the ones who remained, we would like now to extend an equal level of thanks, with our welcome, to the new members of the Advisory board, who truly confirm this list to be that of an All-Star cast of genuinely global PA professors:

- Caspar van den Berg, University of Groningen
- Yannis Charalabidis, University of the Aegean
- Mila Gasco, SUNY Albany
- Thad Hall, University of Utah
- Andrew Massey, University of Exeter
- Ines Mergel, University of Konstanz
- Akira Nakamura, Meiji University
- Reuben Ng, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore
- Janine O'Flynn, University of Melbourne and ANZSOG (joined in 2018 already)

- Leslie A. Pal, Carleton University
- Theresa Pardo, SUNY Albany
- Peter Parycek, Danube University of Krems and Fraunhofer FOCUS Institute Berlin
- Jos Raadschelders, Leiden University
- P.S. Reddy, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
- Hiroko Shimada Logie, Kyoto University
- Ploy Suebvises, National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok
- Lhawang Ugyel, University of New South Wales at Canberra

There were lots of discussions, initiatives, efforts and labors involved in this relaunch, but no reader really cares, and rightly so. Efforts are not awarded in academe, and what matters is the result. We hope that the fruit of the old-new *Halduskultuur* is a unique, sense-making, specific journal that is wide but not too wide in scope, very Estonian and very Ragnar Nurkse Department in its twin foci on PA and eGov, and designed and technically presented in a way appropriate for the second decade of the 21st century. I hope you will agree, collaborate, submit, publish, and cite – that is the only way a journal can, and should, survive.

We hope you will enjoy the first issue, or some of its papers, of the relaunched *Halduskultuur*. We would be happy to receive any feedback on the new form and scope you might have. The main call, however, remains – please submit!