



A European Public Administration Network study



IMPACT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENTS ON THE CENTRAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE

National Institute of Administration, Romania



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AUGUST 5, 2019

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President's word

Strategic planning documents are of utmost importance for an organization to grow and achieve performance in a way that can be measured.

That is why, one of the first things that INA has made since it was reestablished was to reach European renowned experts - in a project funded by the European Commission- in order to put its goals and aims into a strategy, further unfolded into a five year plan. As representatives of the central public administration we must set an example for the central and local authorities about the need to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the strategic documents and that, altogether, should lead to the fulfillment of the Government's goals and to the wellbeing of the citizens.

Naturally, the success of these strategies also depends on the coordination with other relevant public institutions, with the private sector, but also with the support and trust of the civil society. And in order for this to be achieved, we, as part of the network of the national, then European, then international public administration must constantly develop not only our hard skills necessary for an efficient delivery of public service, but also the soft skills to get better cooperation and get closer to the citizens and their needs, as stated also in the EUPAN Strategy Paper 2019-2022, developed under the Romanian Presidency.

EUPAN is an example of good cooperation among countries and thus the work and effort of the member states must not stay within the network, but has to reach the practitioners of the public administration from the member states. To keep the pace with the fast-changing world that we live in, we must share knowledge even faster.

*President of National Institute of Administration
Professor PAVEL NĂSTASE, PhD*



About INA

The National Institute of Administration from Romania (Institutul Național de Administrație /INA/ <http://ina.gov.ro/>) was reestablished at the end of 2016, under the authority of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration.

INA's mission is to enhance the quality of the public administration by training civil servants, management civil servants, high ranking civil servants and appointed or elected officials, as well as contractual staff, from the central and local administration. INA provides both specialized and continuous training. With the recent adoption of the Administrative Code INA has exclusiveness, besides the specialized training of the high-ranking civil servants, also on the specialized training of the middle management positions from the public administration. Likewise, it will have exclusiveness on training the ethics advisers.

Besides the center from Bucharest, INA puts into practice its mission with five territorial centers in the country, located in the capitals of the regions of Romania.

INA aims at being an innovative institution and therefore it uses training methods ranging from offline learning to online and the combination of the two (blended training), provides a virtual library and has an alumni network.

INA is developing its research and innovation component and will act like a liaison between the academia and the public sector, offering quality research-based advice to politicians and public policy makers.

About the authors

Iuliana LECA - Director, Directorate of Communication, Projects, Cooperation and External Relations at the National Institute of Administration

Iuliana has a bachelor's degree in public administration from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and a master's degree in regional development and spatial planning from the University of Architecture and Urban Planning "Ion Mincu". She has an extensive experience in coordinating national and international projects financed from EU funding, as well as in offering technical assistance regarding project management and strategic planning. She led the Unit for the implementation of PHARE projects at INA, between 2003-2008.

She participated in drafting various strategic documents like national strategies, but also in developing local strategies and urban mobility plans for Bucharest, as well for major cities in Romania. Since 2018 she runs the Directorate for Communication, Projects, Cooperation, External Relations at INA.

Fabrice LARAT - Deputy-director for training and education in charge of masters programmes & Director of the Research center of public administration at École Nationale d'Administration

Fabrice Larat (born 1966) is a graduate from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Lyon, France, and of the Graduate Institute of European Studies of Geneva, Switzerland. He holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary History at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris and an habilitation to supervise PhD in political science from the university of Strasbourg.

He is director of the research institute on administrative science at the French Ecole Nationale d'Administration, in Strasbourg and also deputy director of the department of education and training, in charge of master programs and research activities. Since 2008, he is the chief editor of the *Revue française d'administration publique*. He has widely published in the fields of European integration and of public administration.

Roxana-Varvara BOBOC - President's counsellor at the National Institute of Administration

Roxana has a bachelor's degree in Communication and Public Relations at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, where she finished with the highest ranking among their graduating class. Throughout the years she took part in an Erasmus+ mobility, several international conferences and science fairs and is fond of interdisciplinary studies. She pursued her academic path at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies where she studied Marketing and Business Communication. She has been working as a counsellor since October 2019 and her activities were mostly oriented on the communication and research components. She took part in several study visits on research both in Bucharest, Romania and at École Nationale d'Administration, France.



Starting with September 2019, she will undertake a research master's in Media Studies in the Netherlands.

Executive summary

The aim of the study was to provide the EUPAN network members with a comparative overview of the use of strategic planning documents (SPD) in the European Union member states' central public administrations and of their impact in terms of performance improvement.

The study unfolded into 3 main activities - a questionnaire sent to the EUPAN member states, then a Working Level meeting, followed by a further panel at the Directors General meeting.

Drafting SPD implies having a reliable set of data, competent assigned employees and coordination with the political input. Is this attainable? What are the main barriers in the process of creating and implementing SPD? How can the Directors General (DG) ensure the link between political decision and strategic implementation? Does SPD improve the performance of Central Public Administration? These were some of the questions this study pursued to answer, so that a clearer image of the strategic planning documents' impact on the central public administration performance is created.

The study helped to shed light on the usage of the documents, on the drafting, implementation and assessment processes and on observing the perceived impact on central public administration performance. Moreover, the study unveiled barriers encountered by both users and directors general in every of the aforementioned stages of the strategic planning documents, like the lack of solid data, unclear or incoherent objectives, lack of key performance indicators, overlapping strategies, etc.

There are also good aspects when using SPD, as the study shows, among which a higher level of transparency and of collaboration within the institution, as well as with the stakeholders, a higher level of awareness as regard to the goals of the organization.

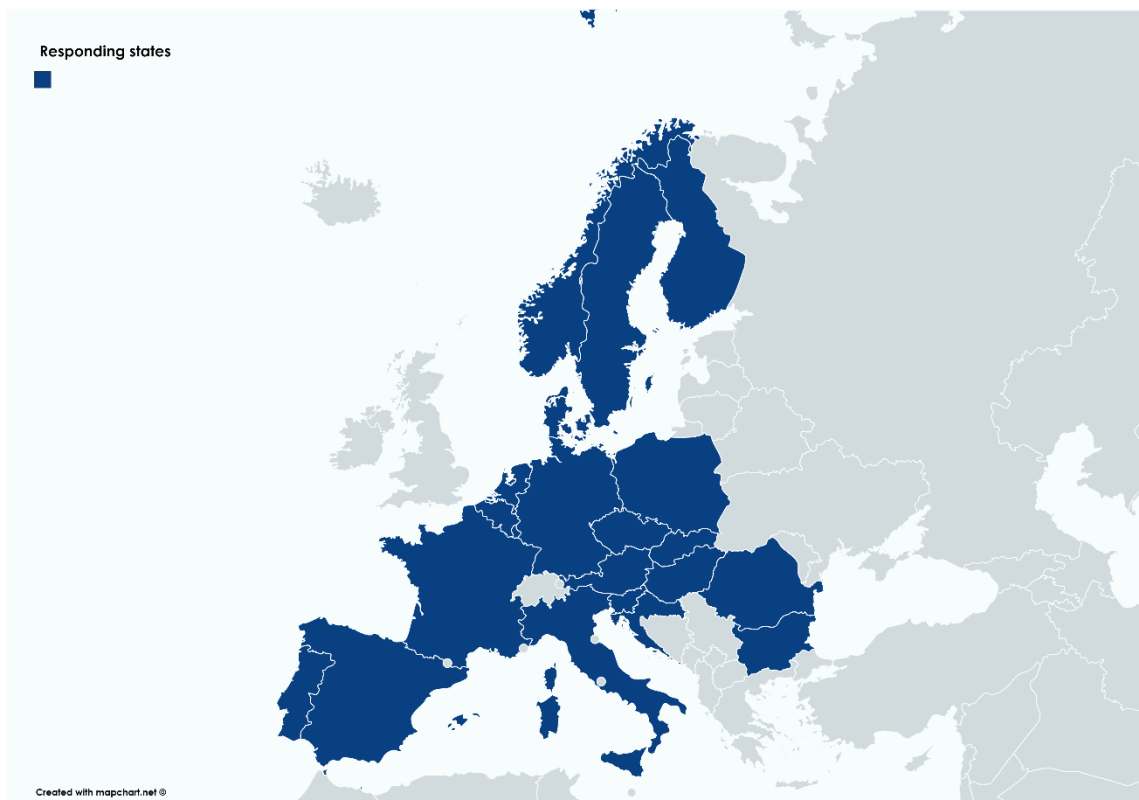
The findings of the study reveal that SPD are used in all the European member countries of the EUPAN network (in various forms) and that, more or less, they encounter the same problems in the processes involved in the SPD. Likewise, according to the study, but as well to literature review there is no clear connection between strategic planning and performance of the organization, as well as to the public spending. More research needed in this regard.

Methodology

As mentioned previously, the study had 3 components: a questionnaire, a Working Level meeting and a Directors General meeting.

The questionnaire was online and has been designed by the INA team with help from F. Larat from the National School of Administration from France and sent to all EUPAN contact persons prior to the meeting to collect data and opinions related to the national use of strategic planning documents and their impact on the central public administration performance. The purpose of the questions was to get insights on the kind of strategic planning documents used in central public administrations in the different EU member states as a means of management by objectives, i.e. via combining strategic planning with performance appraisal.

The survey was answered by 22 representatives of European states and 1 representative of the European Commission (as shown in the map below). The functions of the responders are: advisor, counsellor, auditor, analyst, desk officer, policy officer, inspector, director, project manager. The responders were experts and provided the best answer to their knowledge, however they had to summarize specific answers in order to reply to the questions in the name of the institution they come from.



The second phase of the study implied a working meeting among the EUPAN director generals (DG). The meeting took place between 3-4 June 2019 in Bucharest. Top management representatives from states in Europe participated in the plenary sessions and at the workshop organized in order to obtain the leadership perspective and integrate it in the study results. The workshops were organized as World café, meaning that each participant attended all 4 subjects of the EUPAN meeting and all of them could bring their input to the study topics. Our topic had 3 rounds of discussions.

The third part that completed the study was the meeting of the EUPAN Working Level group, that took place between 8-9th April 2019, in Focșani, Vrancea county, Romania. As part of the meeting, INA prepared a workshop to be presented in 2 rounds. In order to do so, INA partnered with Fabrice LARAT, the Deputy-director for training and education in charge of masters programmes & Director of the Research center of public administration at *École Nationale d'Administration*, who agreed to be the main moderator and was helped by Iuliana LECA - *Director of the Communication, Projects, Cooperation, External Relations at the National Institute of Administration* and Roxana BOBOC - *President's counsellor at the National Institute of Administration*.

Part 1. Results from EUPAN survey on the Impact of Strategic Planning Documents on the Central Public Administration Performance

Use of strategic planning documents

Strategic planning is a set of concepts, procedures, tools, and practices meant to help decision makers and other stakeholders to focus on what is truly important for their organizations and/or activities. It is both a public and a private management tool which may include a variety of activities, such as: setting organizational goals, defining tasks, establishing internal and external tasks and task forces, identifying key issues, developing strategies for each particular issue, planning control and adopting of procedures, taking fundamental decisions, undertaking actions, constant control and communication of results.

All of the responding countries have planning documents aiming at enhancing public administration performance.

Regarding the kind of strategic documents used, they are referred to in different ways: “Strategic Planning and Programming in Europe” (European Commission), “management by objectives”, “long and medium term policy programs”, “main public policy priorities”, “policy planning system”, “State Administration Development Strategy”, “Government Programme, documents for Annual performance”.

Below is a table with the type of SPD identified by the EUPAN members:

Name/type/kind of SPD	Country
Document contains: 1. a three-year work programme; 2. the organigramme; 3. the job description; 4. the job interview of each individual with his/her superior; 5. the individual work programme.	<i>Luxembourg</i>
Long term policy programs + medium term specialized strategies plans	<i>Germany</i>
Long term Government Program, Short term Major Plan Options, Annual State Budget, Assessment and Accountability Framework, Action Plans, Mission Charter (top managers).	<i>Portugal</i>
Policy planning system, Public institutions strategies	<i>Latvia</i>
Planes estratégicos, Programas plurianuales	<i>Spain</i>
State Administration Development Strategy 2014-2020 (and the Roadmap for its implementation 2015-2020).	<i>Bulgaria</i>
Strategies for policy fields + Budget documents	<i>Austria</i>
Government Programme - Government Action Plan, The annual state central government budget, Performance Agreements, Strategies on different policy areas Government decisions-in-principle The General Government Fiscal Plan, Management Agreements	<i>Finland</i>
The sectoral annual budget proposition, the letter of appropriation	<i>Norway</i>

from the Ministry to subsidiary agencies and the annual report from the agency to the Ministry.	
Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, The Public Administration Development Strategy 2015-2020	<i>Republic of Slovenia</i>
National reform programme 2018, Public administration development strategy 2015 - 2020, Action plan for the implementation of the public administration development strategy for the period 2017 to 2020, e-croatia 2020 Strategy and Action plan, Partnership agreement Republic of Croatia 2014 and Operational programme under the 'Investment for growth and jobs' goal 2014-2020	<i>Croatia</i>
wide variety of strategies and action plans	<i>Sweden</i>
Objectives and results plan	<i>Denmark</i>
Strategic planning documents are used for different kinds of topics	<i>The Netherlands</i>
Strategies related to ex-ante conditionalities - their number is higher than 20	<i>Romania</i>
National Reform Programmes and the budget law. Performance plan, Annual Directive, Notes to the budget law	<i>Italy</i>
Administrative contracts and administrative plans	<i>Belgium</i>
The Plan for Responsible Development Medium-term strategy for the country's development: The Strategy of Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030)	<i>Poland</i>
State budget (Projet de loi de finances PLF), Documents for performance	<i>France</i>
Policies, strategies, strategic frameworks, plans, implementation plans, action plans, operational programmes, other programmes	<i>Czech Republic</i>
The Government of the Slovak republic adopts the Government Programme that is implemented through Strategies for policy fields. <i>The Methodics and Institutional framework for creation of public strategies</i> provides the framework for the creation of such Strategies.	<i>The Slovak republic</i>
Public Administration and Public Service Development Strategy 2014-2020	<i>Hungary</i>
Strategic Planning and Programming - each department uses a multi-annual planning tool (Strategic Plan) supported by an annual planning instrument (Management Plan). These are accompanied by Annual Activity Reports monitoring the implementation of the Strategic Planning and Programming.	<i>*European commission</i>

As expected, the concept of strategic planning documents represents a wide range of the type of document used - it is either strategy, (performance / objectives and results) plan, planning system, policy or Government programme, it can be accompanied by an annual plan or a budget. In addition to this, the documents are usually adopted within the framework of laws and decrees.

In terms of usage, it appears that the strategic planning documents are mainly mandatory for all public organizations. In more than half of the cases, these documents are legally binding, leaving the other cases with indicative value only.

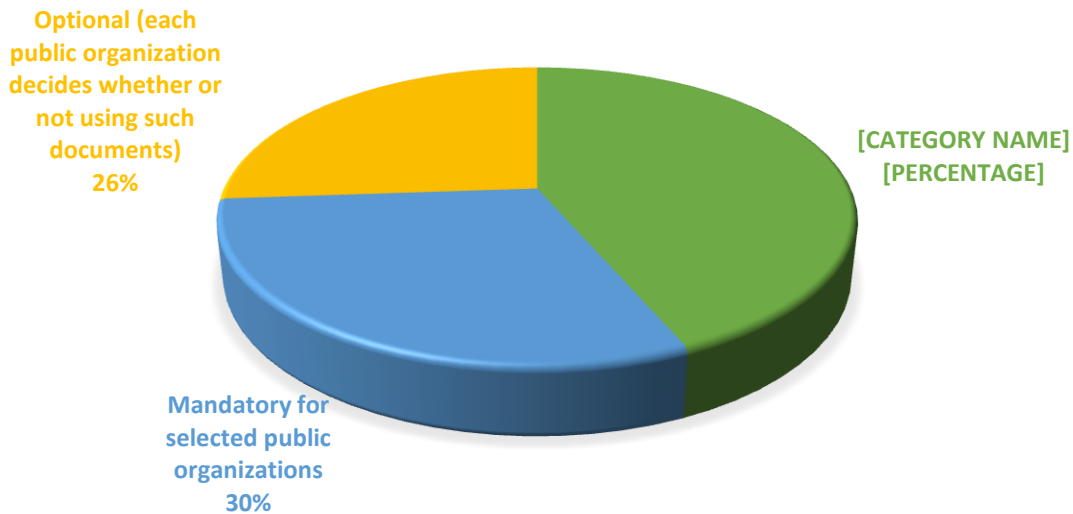


Figure 1: The mandatoriness of using SPD

The domains in which the strategic planning documents are used range from public policy making (with more than 85% of cases), to human resources and projects. However, these documents are also used in the fields of Government service levels or management of public administration entities. Most of the times, there is a strategic planning document for each public organization - predominantly for ministries, but also for agencies, and sometimes for other public bodies as well.

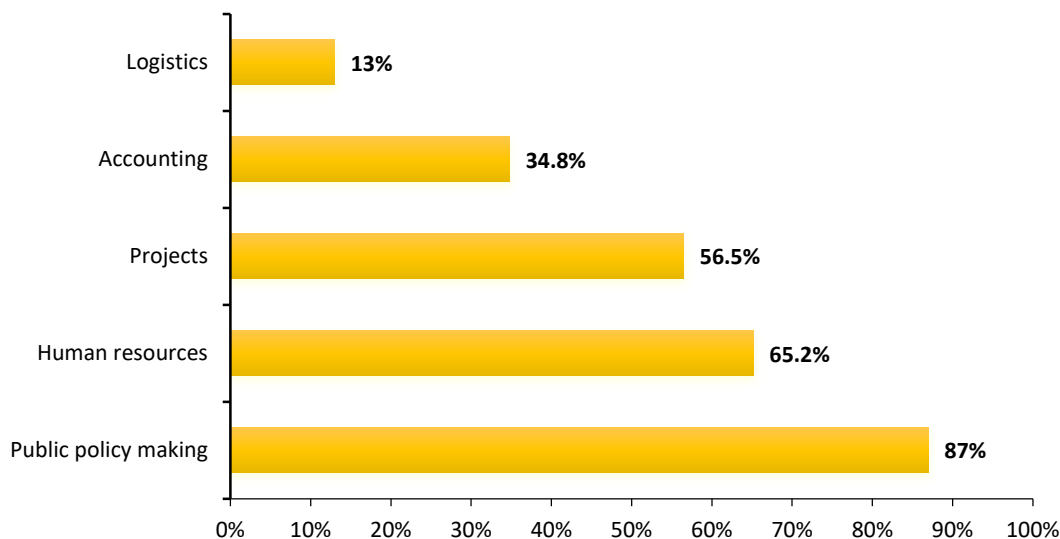


Figure 2: The fields of activity for which SPD are mostly used

Drafting, implementing and assessing strategic planning documents

Typically, the General secretariat of the organization itself is in charge of drafting the document, and sometimes the task belongs to the central body in charge of coordination; rarely is the drafting taken to external consultancy. However, the process of drafting the documents varies from one state to another.

Whereas the structure of the documents varies as well, almost all contain performance indicators (90% of the respondent), which is a crucial step in the assessment of the activity. Usually, the timeframe covered by the strategic planning documents is over 36 months, only in a minority of countries the timeframe is under 24 months.

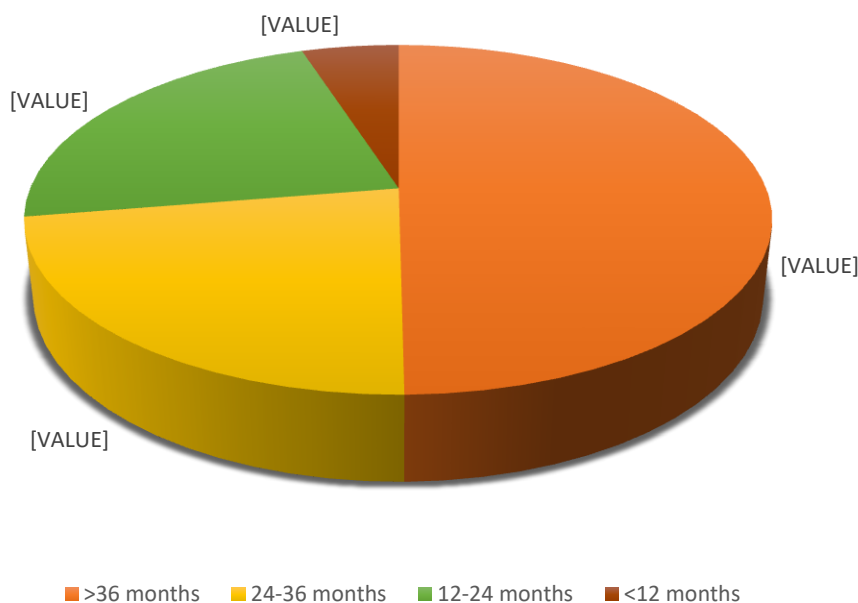


Figure 3: Timeframe covered by SPD

The difficulties met when drafting the documents were a key part of understanding the dynamic of the documents' usage and practical barriers that might affect their final results. The lack of reliable information data is the most common difficulty mentioned, followed by the lack of appropriate skills among the persons in charge of drafting documents and the lack of coordination between the different strategic planning documents used in the specific country at the same time, as well as the lack of political vision of strategic thinking. Apart from these, it appeared that some countries find it difficult to define impact indicators and to structure a balanced planning - nor too detailed, nor too general. Moreover, some responses showed that there is a lack of focus on value creation in target formulation, while others pointed out the weakness in statistical cooperation, weakness in interministerial cooperation, as well as the missing link to the public budget.

Interestingly, the documents are a result of a consultation process in more than 90% of the cases. Among the actors consulted, we can name the following most common answers: relevant/main stakeholders, Heads of Division/managers, the central services, different ministries, agencies and other public bodies. Practitioners, experts, researchers, NGOs and citizens were not very common answers.

In terms of responsibility of implementing the plan, it is attributed on different levels depending on the nature of the strategy or of the objective set. Thus, it ranges from belonging to the coordinator of the institution to being shared with the other public organizations and bodies involved in the document, as well as the Government. Predominantly, there is no special body in charge of monitoring implementation of strategic planning document (only 30% “yes” cases).

Implementing the strategic planning documents presents a variety of difficulties as well, among which the most common is, again, the lack of reliable data, followed by the lack of coordination, lack of appropriate skills among staff members and lack of interest and of commitment of the staff members. Other notable barriers underlined in the responses were the lack of financial resources for implementation, the fact that a strategy can become outdated and in need of a new design, or that targeted objectives or policy instruments are not properly chosen.

When it comes to assessment, it is most frequently made by an internal department. The main difficulties when assessing the impact of such documents seem to be, most frequently, the absence of relevant performance indicators, followed by strategic objectives not clearly defined. Other barriers worth mentioning that were brought up by the respondents were the quality of the performance indicators, the limitation of financial means and the difficulty in formulating goals in specific cases.

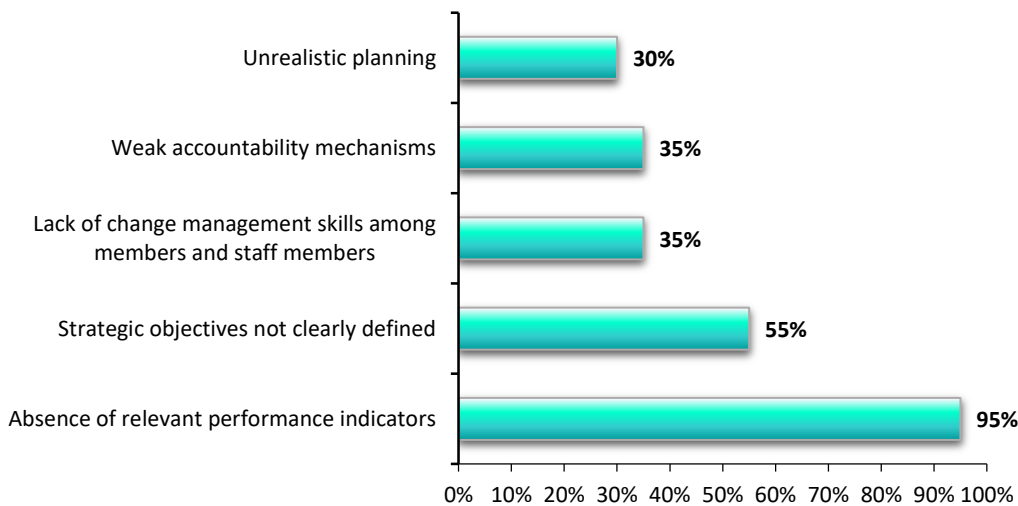


Figure 4: Main difficulties when assessing the impact of SPD

There are also consequences which derive from the assessment of the documents, and these usually mean an update and/or a modification based on the results of the assessment of the strategic planning documents and the results of the assessment will be taken into consideration to revise other related strategic planning documents. Sometimes, the result of the assessment will be shared with all relevant stakeholders within the organization and approximately a quarter of the respondents concluded that there are no real consequences.

When asked about how institutional strategic planning improves the efficiency of public administration, the results were as follows:

The greatest number of respondents consider that strategic planning documents raise awareness about objectives.

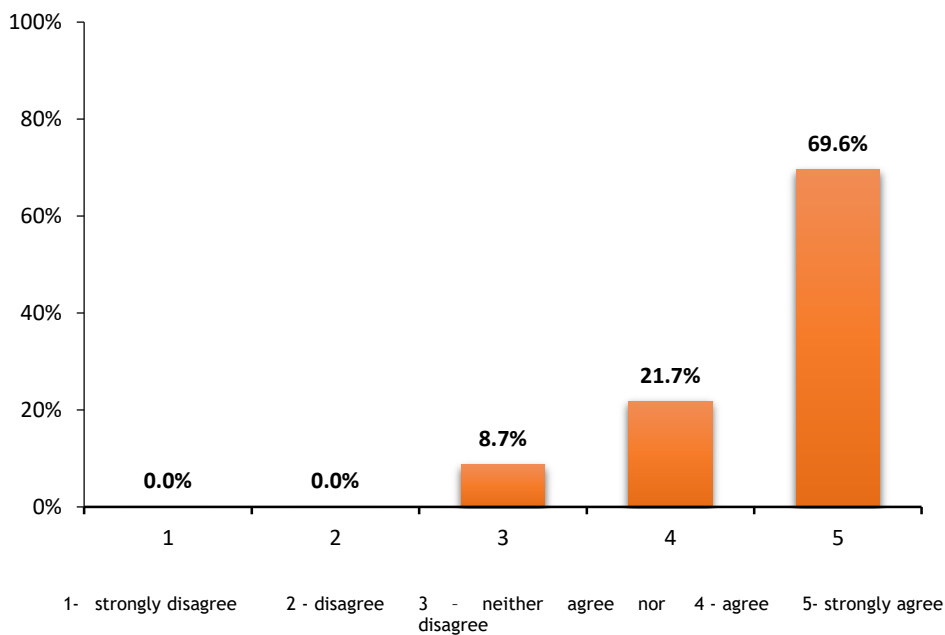


Figure 5: Raising awareness about objectives

About half of the respondents also consider that the documents improve the mobilization of all stakeholders.

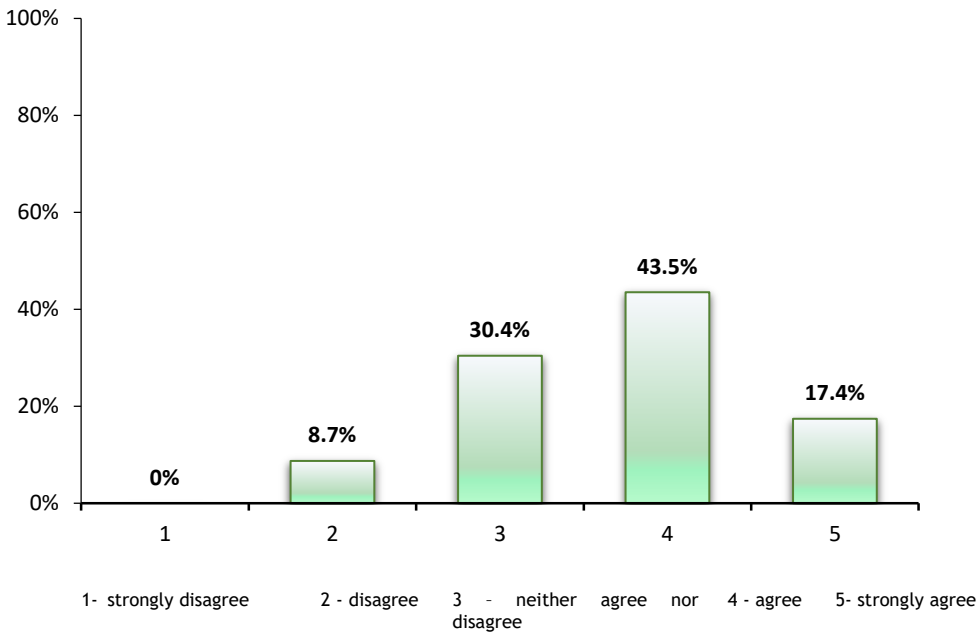


Figure 6: Mobilizing all stakeholders

As for the contributions of SPD to identify weak points, opinions seem to be pretty much contrasted, depending on the countries.

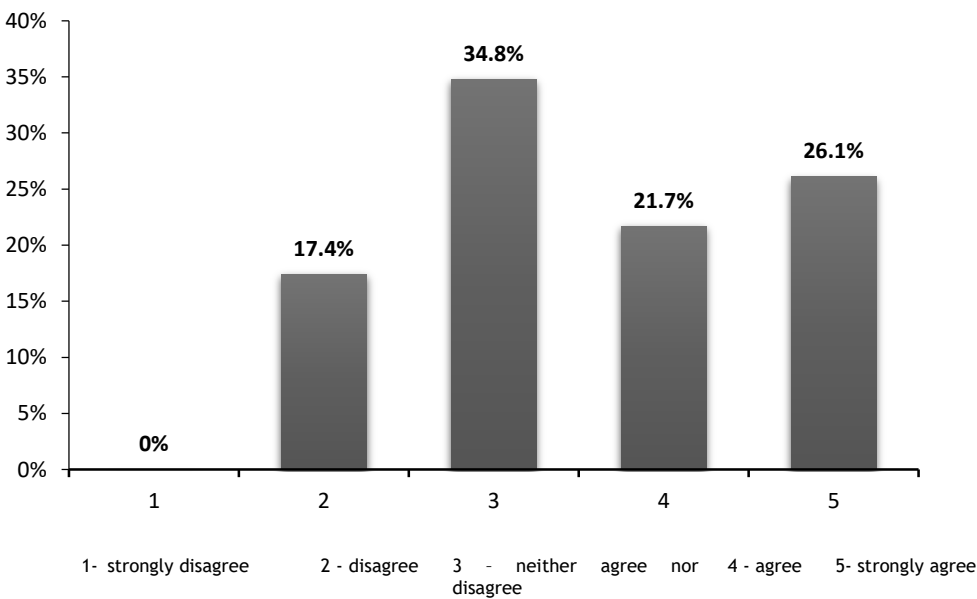


Figure 7: Identifying weak points

Most of participants consider that the strategic planning documents moderately improve the combination of efforts and development of synergies.

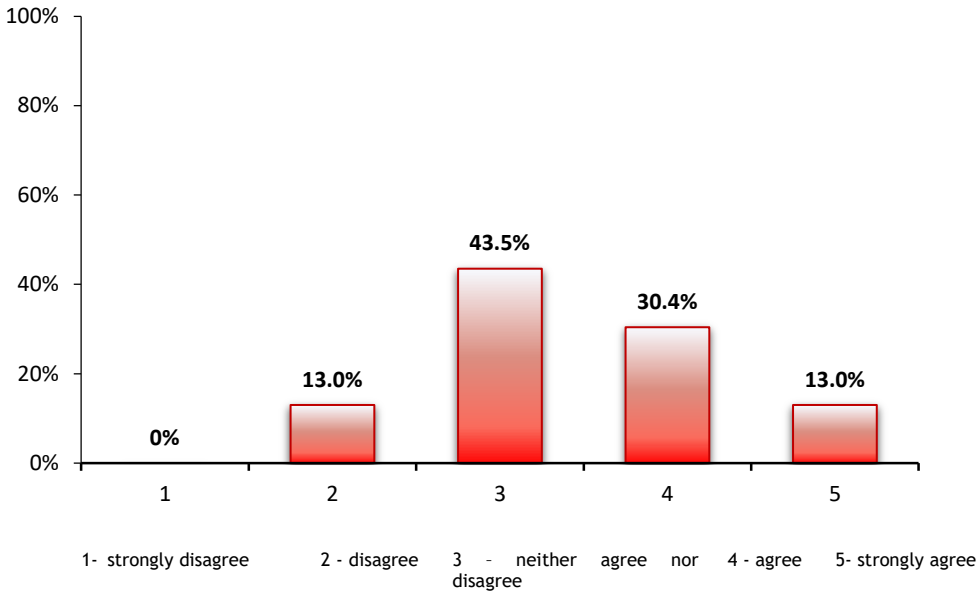


Figure 8: Combining efforts and developing synergies

Most participants consider that the documents improve the strengthening of coherence and consistency.

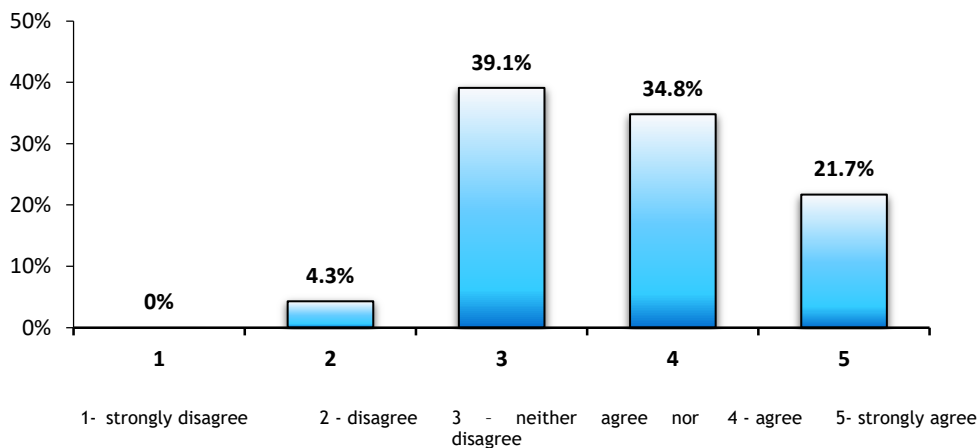


Figure 9: Strengthening coherence and consistency

Most of the participants appreciate that the coordination between organizations is moderately improved by the documents.

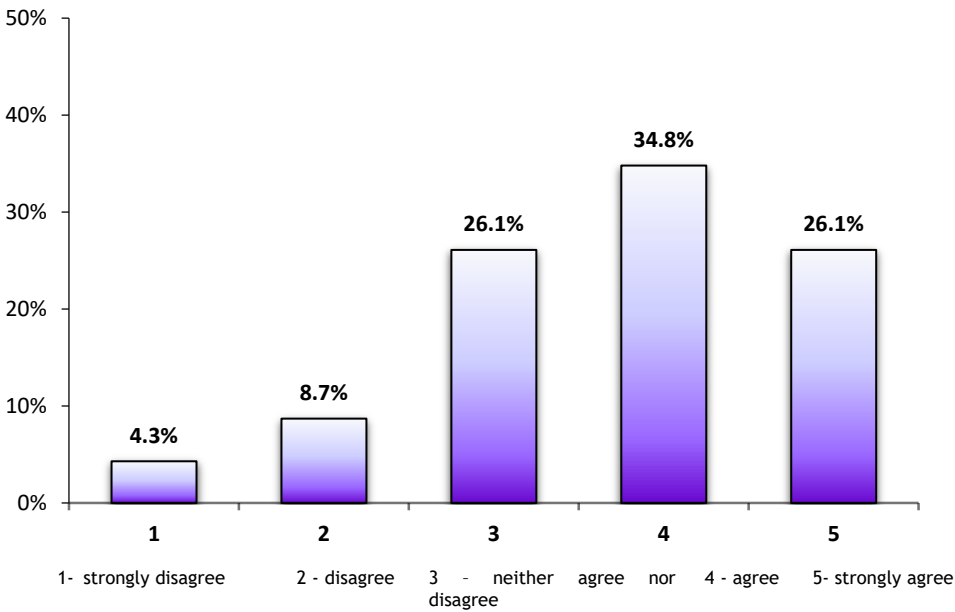


Figure 10: Increasing coordination between organizations

The majority of respondents consider that the strategic planning documents enhance the transparency of public administration.

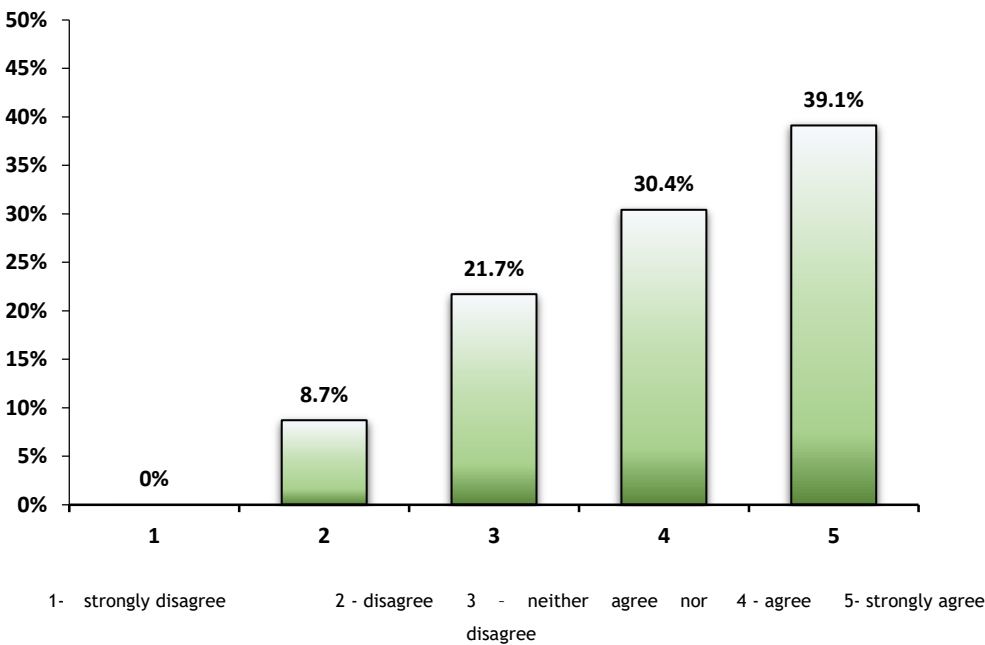
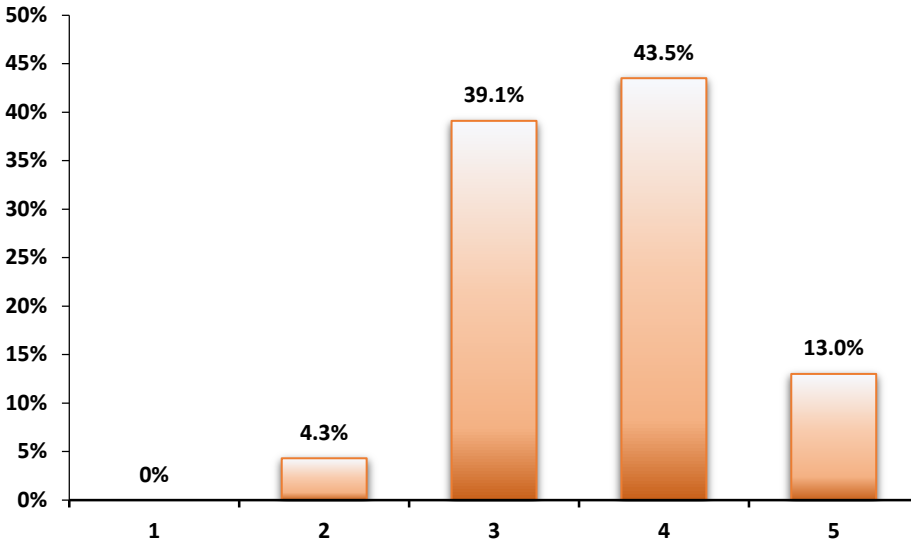


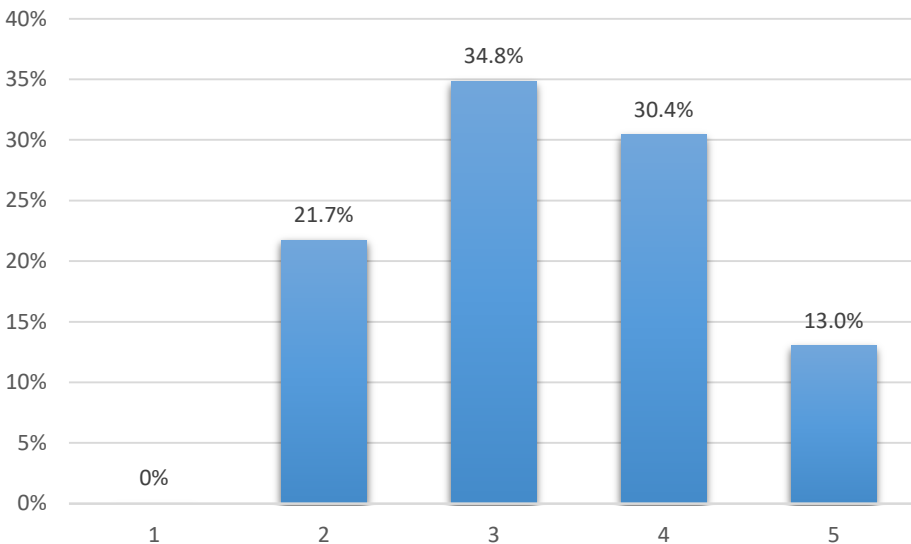
Figure 11: Enhancing transparency of public administration

According to the experience of the respondents, the use of strategic documents highly improves efficiency of public policies, yet only moderately improves the efficiency of public spending and the efficiency of organizational performance of public administration.



1 - no contribution 2 - low contribution 3 - neither low nor considerable contribution 4 - considerable contribution 5 - strong contribution

Figure 12: The extent to which the use of SPD improves the efficiency of public policies



1 - no contribution 2 - low contribution 3 - neither low nor considerable contribution 4 - considerable contribution 5 - strong contribution

Figure 13: The extent to which the use of SPD improves the efficiency of public spending

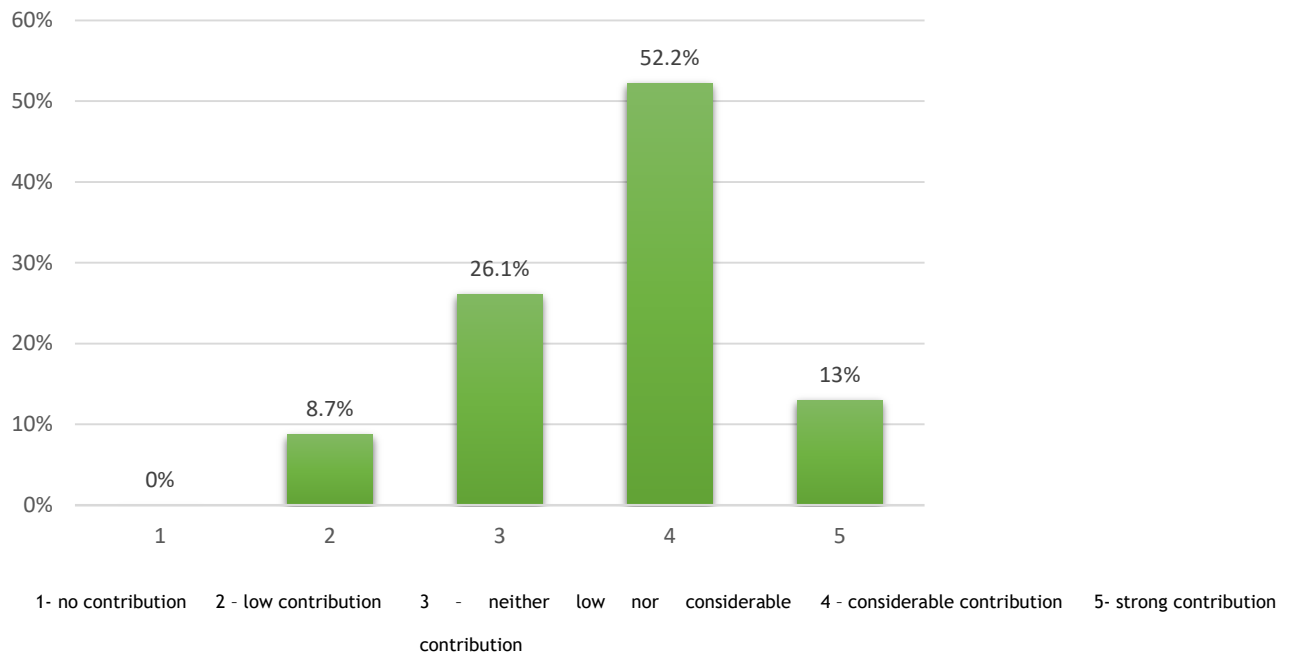


Figure 14: The extent to which the use of SPD improves the organizational performance

Part 2. Results from EUPAN WL workshops on the Impact of Strategic Planning Documents on the Central Public Administration Performance

Round #1, 8th April 2019

Participants: MAGNUSSEN Heidi Hauk (Norway), MAIWALD Christian (Germany), MÁTRAI KISNÉ Julianna (Hungary), MICALLEF Gillian (Malta), NEBBEN Eivor (Norway), SESTAK Matus (Slovakia).

The workshop began with a clarification of the meaning of „strategic planning”. The German representative started with a strong statement: „There is no strategic planning in public administration”, but rather there is strategic planning with the staff which is not working, nor a strategy, but rather a list of priorities for politics.

However, the following question was proposed before presenting and discussing the results of the survey: Why do we need strategic planning in public administration? The main reason is that because resources are limited, we need a plan that requires a strategy. Its purpose is to create unity, cohesion, concentration, meaning, so that public action can set actors in motion and mobilize resources in the same direction and in a coherent and efficient way. Thus, the instrument that are strategic planning documents has to produce efficiency through coordination, cooperation and control.

Another point was made by the moderator as introduction - Previously, public administration was best described in association with law and regulation, whereas now it is increasingly characterized by management and instruments. Their aim is to mobilize resources, gather data and to get solutions. If we decide to design specific instruments, we expect something of them, a solution, so are they useful? Can they improve performance?

The following typology of strategic documents was suggested:

1. Meta level (national)

Example: Defining the government strategy in a key policy field (for instance: defence and security) on the mid to the long run (couple of years). Kind of document used: „white paper/white book”. A widespread of SPD at national level is also performance budgeting which combines the allocation of resources (subsidies for different kind of public policies or entities, maximal number of positions available) with performance objectives (indicators)

2. Mezzo level - Example: documents that set specific organizations (public authorities, independent bodies) or units of large organization (departments or DGs within a ministry) objectives as part of a general strategy to be achieved in a certain period of time with help of performance indicators and performance contract

3. Individual level - Example: Documents that are being set by top level managers (Director generals, heads of departments, directors of agencies...) with priorities and objectives to be met during a certain period of time, combined with indicators.

Independently from the level and the degree of specificity regarding the objectives, each strategic planning document is combined with an obligation to report on the achievements (for instance through performance indicators) and as such represents of form of constraint for the way a public policy is conducted and how a public administrations are managed.

As a reaction to the presentation of the survey results, the points raised by the group merely focused on how to make plans in turbulent times and how to grasp reality - i.e. how to have empirical evidences of what has been achieved (or not) and how this can be measured in order to be compared with what was expected and to what has been achieved previously.

Beside the epistemic question “what is reality and how do we incorporate it in a meaningful way in strategic planning documents?” , when dealing with such documents, we should always ask ourselves how performance indicators have been defined, what are they supposed to measure, how and who decided about them.

Both German and Hungary representatives pointed out the lack in their respective countries of strategic planning in the field of budget and public finances, as well as deficiencies in the monitoring process. According to answers to the survey, the main difficulties met when drafting the documents are indeed the lack of appropriate skills, information data, coordination and political vision.

Germany raised another point about the need to involve citizens more in the consultation process. Norway’s representative stated that it is important to think how civil service can provide politicians with information, situational analysis, and proposed the possibility of having external independent bodies for this purpose. In addition to that, she said that the bigger challenge for ministries would be to incorporate a mid-long-term perspective to strategic planning since short term thinking is not enough and doesn’t make possible to tackle emerging and up-coming challenges.

The moderator brought in discussion the concept of contract in connection with strategic planning instruments, since SPD are agreements which connects two parties: on the one side these who set the priorities and define the objectives and on the other side the actors who are in charge of achieving the objectives and implement the strategy thanks to the resources provided for which they are accountable and have to report on their achievements via performance indicators for specific time periods. Defining the content and scope of indicator is therefore of great importance. In this context, Indicators are set on things we know we can report on, so they cover a limited number and measurable issues, they are a reduction of reality. Ministries often have little idea of the panoramic situation and should ask agencies for clarifications.

One of the biggest problems that rises from this is formalism - a kind of behavior leading actors in response to their contractual obligations to deliver figures on their activities they know to be inaccurate or not relevant with regards to the question of whether -and how far - objectives have or have not be reached. The reason for this lays either in the impossibility to measure what is asked (for instance in the case an indicator was not designed appropriately) or in the lack of willingness to report on poor performance, which, in this case correspond to a compliance issue (see on this point the literature review) or just because goals were unrealistic. Norway's representative pointed out that in her country there was a change of direction, from quantitative to qualitative evaluation of results, which allow to get more accurate and reliable information about achievements.

The necessary dialogue between stakeholders was also mentioned as a way to improve strategic planning. The co-moderator underlined the importance of involving the general directors in the process of drafting the strategic planning documents. The conclusion of the discussion was that what is necessary for the instruments to work is trust, not control, that there must be an open dialogue on what can be considered as useful and relevant empirical evidence with a bottom-up approach regarding the design of performance indicators

In conclusion, the group stressed the need to avoid what can lead to formalism, since this does not represent any form of help for legislators. In addition, coordination and supervision is important to avoid overlapping strategies or conflicting strategies, and strategic budgeting needs precise and realistic objectives.

Round #2, 10th April 2019

Participants: AŠKERC Marko (Slovenia), AZZOPARDI Myrna (Malta), BANAS Krzysztof (Poland), BELLOTTI Sabina (Italy), CURIC Ivan (Croatia), DONKERS Nicole (Netherlands), DULLIN Stefanie (Germany), GANHÃO Teresa (Portugal), NURMI Johanna (Finland), PAULINI Maroš (Slovakia), PEKONEN Onni (Finland), PĪLĒNA Konstance (Latvia), PUENTE ALCUBILLA Veronica (Spain), RICHTEROVA Livia (Slovakia), SURUGIU George Silvian (Romania), VÁGNEROVÁ Šárka (Czech republic)

The second round of the workshop started with a presentation about strategic planning documents as policy and management tools. The question was “what does the rise of importance of managerial instruments mean for public administrations?” Social science studies teach us that instruments of public action constitute devices with both a technical and a social dimension which organize the social relations between the public authorities and their addressees according to the representations and meanings these instruments of government carry. Therefore, due to their rationality and characteristics they have a strong impact on public administration's work. Performance oriented instruments such as strategic planning documents contribute to the move from a logic mainly focused legal compliance to accountability and evaluation.

As for the different uses of such instruments, Italy's representative explains that in her country the introduction of such instruments is considered to be as a constraint in relation with the European Union. She also pointed out the challenge that consist in the tension between decision-goals time vs. implementation time.

The issue of time

The representative of Slovakia added 2 more challenges: political cycle and complexity. Indeed, different temporalities coexist and can impact the success of a strategic planning document. Experience show that there are major time differences and discrepancies between the temporality of the political cycles (campaign, elections, appointment of new ministers), of the policy cycle (different stages of policy making: identification of a policy problem, policy formulation and policy design, policy implementation, policy evaluation...), and the internal time of public administrations (procedures, working time, reforms...). Short rhythms of evaluation (less than 3 years period) are considered to be inappropriate because they are too much time consuming and intensive reporting represent a bureaucratic burden that affects performance. The action of compliance to the rules and report obligations despite of wrong objectives is another issue which was underlined by the participants.

The connection between objectives and results

Another important issue is the problematic relationship between the objectives as target to be met within the framework of the strategy's implementation, and the outputs and outcomes as expected results that should be evaluated and measured to be sure the strategy is effective and successful. This raises the question of the intervening factors that can influence this relationship: are the resources allocated to the strategy sufficient/appropriate? Are the indicators used to measure performance real evidences for a modified reality as an effect of the strategy? Is there a link of causality between the actions undertaken and the achievements? Is the time period after which a report is due sufficient/appropriate to display evidences for results? Is the bureaucratic burden resulting from the use of such instruments (designing the strategy and indicators, collecting data and evidences, drafting reports) in relationship with the added value of these instruments to enhance public action's performance?

How can we be sure that they are correctly set/decided? The instrument helps to clarify the context and to choose the correct path to the results.

Another topic was whether it is possible to measure everything which raises the data/evidence issue. The group started a discussion about the difference between outputs, which are instant consequences, and outcomes as results which become visible first on the mid or long run, Italy underlined the dynamics-stability problem, saying that frequent check-

ins leave shorter time for assessing the impact. Finland emphasized the importance of trust for achieving sustainable reforms, and Slovakia added that the more control, the less trust.

Italy suggested that the trial and error process should not be punished, as it leads to manipulated results out of fear of mistakes. This is a necessary process and it can build trust as well.

The issue of coherence and diversity in defining a strategy

Finland's representative underlined an interesting aspect of drafting strategies - the aim should be to concentrated on few most important priorities; however, when defining a strategy, every stakeholder tries to get his/her area of expertise on the list of priorities, so there are many links with many actions, resulting in a document that is not strategic anymore because everyone wishes to be visible.

Regarding this problem, the moderator concluded that dialogue between the parties involved in a SPD tends to become faulty, because of faulty construction that contradicts the rationality of the instrument. For example, if people wish to be visible, they might choose objectives that are not relevant and thus negatively impact the whole strategy and its coherence.

Achievements, indicators and accountability

Another point was made by Slovakia's representative, who said that the higher in the administrative hierarchy you are, the higher you identify with the institution, which can lead to manipulating the results in the idea of looking best.

Motivation is another important element, and to motivate implies that all individuals understand what he/she has to do, hence the importance of explaining the objectives and the reason why priorities are set.

The discussion then moved into the direction of the civil servants - politicians dialogue, underlining the fact that civil servant have to manage expectations coming from the political side as well as from users of public services. A matter of policy making is how inclusive it is and what is at stake, but that was linked to cultural background and with the capacity of cultural change that may considerably vary from country to country. Inclusiveness was considered part of the ideological context.

The Slovak representative emphasized an important mission of civil servants - the mission to facilitate dialogue, to make public administration a tool and not an obstacle (for instance to bring politicians/parties together, to consult them in time etc.).

Positive examples and best practices

Portugal's representative pointed out a case of fruitful dialogue, where negotiation and flexibility are existent through the cooperation between directors and staff members, creating transparency and objectivity. Finland agreed in the sense that dialogue is crucial in their case too, especially in the control equation (top & bottom civil servants), where politicians have no autonomy and make detailed plans.

Finland stated that they have a new consultation format in implementation, where they use the logic of consequences - taking into consideration things to happen, and this could be presented as a best case on its own.

Part 3. Results from EUPAN DG meetings on the Impact of Strategic Planning Documents on the Central Public Administration Performance

The workshop started from a set of preliminary remarks: first of all, strategic planning documents are vital instruments for public management nowadays. They can take different forms, depending on level of activity and purpose, as the questionnaire and the discussion during the previous WL meeting also suggested. Moreover, in connection with the objective to increase organizational performance, strategic planning documents combine 2 key principles of new public management that are relevant for the organization of public administrations:

- 1) *The separation between functions of strategic planning steering and control on one side, and of execution/implementation on the other side;*
- 2) *A performance-oriented form of management based upon “contractualization” (linking objectives and resources to indicators and reporting obligations)*

The discussions were split into 3 sub-topics, one per group:

1. *Are SPD useful in achieving and assessing performance? What are the main obstacles met in the process of choosing / implementing a strategic plan?*
2. *Strategic planning instruments often have a contractual dimension between those who define the strategy, set the objectives and provide the resources needed, and those who are in charge of the implementation and who are accountable for their organization’s performance. Reporting obligations, especially with regards to performance indicators may lead to cases of formalism from the side of the bodies in charge of implementing the elements of the strategy and who may be tempted to provide pro forma or inaccurate information on the results obtained. With regards to your experience, to which extend is this phenomenon common? What are the consequences? How to prevent it?*
3. *How can central administrations make sure that political decisions regarding strategic planning will be implemented as meant and foreseen?*

Topic 1

One of the aims of this workshop session was to gain insights regarding the perceived usefulness of the strategic planning documents in the participants’ view. Firstly, the documents seem to be useful in any cases for big projects but not for daily business, according to the participant from Germany. Cyprus’ representative added the necessity to have close link to the budgetary planning, so that the strategic planning documents are very much in line with it.

A crucial aspect related to usefulness is to make sure that the objectives and the means are clearly defined. The absence of this factor can deteriorate the overall strategy and the outputs. Decision makers are bound to the content which facilitates political continuity.

The first topic helped create a picture of the main obstacles the directors general find related to a strategic plan. First of all, the lack of hierarchy between different strategies affects the quality of the implementation process, as the Finland representative pointed out. On the other hand, there are cases in which there are too many strategic planning documents, according to the participant from Bulgaria, which makes implementation hard to be carried out. Lithuania's representative added the fact that there is often no differentiation between the levels of strategy, and this can lead to confusion or, eventually, lack of coordination. The Czech Republic representative drew attention over one of the most important obstacles, the fact that there is a problem of change and evolution as for the political decision makers involved, making any strategy vulnerable to these components, especially in term of continuity and consistency. One more problem encountered was, as the Portugal participant added, the difficulty to translate strategic planning documents as operational goals.

Together, the participants outlined some possible solutions to these obstacles: the first one is to have guidelines with clear objectives and explanations about the purpose/sense of the strategy and how the means should help to reach objectives. Another important improvement needed in order to assure quality and coordination is to have the supervision of all strategic planning documents done by one authority. This, however, can only work if coordination mechanisms are introduced. In order to do so, a communication in both directions is necessary.

Topic 2

The second topic aimed to respond to a double question: How the central administration can make sure that decisions will be implemented as meant in the SPD (this refers to the question "*what shall be done?*") and as foreseen in the SPD ("*how it shall be done?*")

In answering the question, possible reasons for deficient compliance during implementation were identified. One of them was the lack of realism during the definition of objectives by political decision makers, as Italy's representative pointed out. The participant from France added the danger of creating a strategic planning documents as a mere toolbox without vision or coherence. Estonia's representative added the fact that there is a discrepancy in temporalities between administrative and political time, and this gap can generate issues in the creation and implementation of such documents. Moreover, the lack of continuity between governments represents a threat to any strategy, affecting its sustainability and relevance. Another major problem was underlined by Finland's participant, who stated the issue of political dynamic - the mistrust between partners, which makes things complicated.

The common conclusion was that objectives always need to be interpreted and the means always need to be adapted. According to the group, the important factors that matter in this equation are, first of all, to maintain the big picture in mind when dealing with strategic

planning documents. Another key success factor is maintaining dialogue during implementation. This dialogue has to involve as many stakeholders as possible, from civil servants, to actual users, in order to ensure the right objectives and to sketch a realistic strategy. Another conclusion has to do with how these documents have to be perceived - they should be understood as a framework, a direction, rather than a rigid contract.

That being said, the main challenges seem to be the duality between “differentiation vs generalization”; there are often big differences between fulfilling goals and achieving results, which makes the implementation process a crucial yet delicate one.

Topic 3

The discussion focused on the effect of contractualization on the relationship between objectives and performance indicators. Formalism can be considered as a threat for a realistic use of strategic planning documents, and it is a behaviour that generates further problems. It is often caused by inaccurate information and data, and the group identifies some of the reasons. Denmark’s representative underlined the reporting as being too bureaucratic or complex, which makes the implementation become unnecessarily complicated.

Another reason is the fact that the decision makers need measurable results for communication, as emphasized by Portugal’s participant. Even if political decision makers need figures in a quantifiable manner as a mean of comparison and of “visualization” of output and outcomes, not all achievements are quantitatively measurable, as mentioned by Sweden’s representative.

Basically, SPD too often are the mirror of wrong expectations regarding the objectivity of what can be reported in terms of performance, which in returns show the limits of having the ambition to conduct an evidence-based policy

The solutions considered by the group were as follows:

- Limited number of goals that are related to core tasks
- Bottom-up definition of goals
- Develop ownership
- Qualitative instead of solely quantitative indicators
- The possibility to experiment and to learn from mistakes
- A stronger focus on change management
- The need for more critical thinking and a greater consideration of social sciences knowledge/research results, as they can help increase the quality of outputs through higher productivity the sense of involvement.

Moreover, three kind of structural problems should be taken into consideration and can negatively influence the relevance and success of strategic planning documents:

- *Should strategic planning documents be merely considered as instruments of control (with the perspective of sanctions as main driving force) or rather as instrument of steering to instigate and promote change in a certain direction?*
- *To what extent the division of labour between strategic planning and implementation as a form of ownership segmentation is an obstacle for an appropriate definition of objectives and for a better adaptation to reality?*
- *Last but not least, national or sectoral managerial and administrative cultures very much influence the way such instruments are used and can limit their efficiency because they are the cause for formalism, rigidity, and absence of ownership.*

Conclusions

This study outlined key elements regarding the impact of strategic planning documents on the central public administration performance. It was not meant to create a framework for harmonization and standardized use of these documents among the EUPAN member states, but rather to raise awareness towards how the documents are perceived and assessed. Moreover, the study revealed some common barriers and obstacles encountered at different stages of the strategic planning process.

The shared conclusions are that the need to have clearly defined and correct objectives is omnipresent. There is concern related to the quality and reliability of data experienced by most of the people. Along with that, the strategic planning documents should be a guidance force and to be accompanied by a budgetary planning. Most importantly, the strategic planning should involve all decision makers as well as those who, like the civil servants in charge of implementing policy and delivering public services, better know the reality of the needs and existing problems in order to improve the relevance and appropriateness of the SPD.

The study helped identify key values belonging to the participants - realism and objectivity, coherence, attainability, involvement, continuity, dialogue between all participants and, more critical thinking.

To conclude, according to the workshop participants, the strategic planning documents are only desirable and meaningful if they are, indeed, meant to reach relevant achievable objectives clearly distributed among organizations and levels, if they are only a guideline and not an overlapping set of different uncoherent strategies, and if the actors creating and implementing them feel involved in the process.

Appendix: Literature review

The following literature review provides insights and elements of analysis that can be helpful to understand the relevance of such instruments for public administrations as well as the way they are used in European Union member states.

Introduction

Strategies in the public sector are more than an organizational vision. To put in their words, Sue Llewellyn and Emma Tappin argue that:

‘Strategies’ signal greater devolved responsibility in the public sector for both acquiring resources and achieving results. They enable the inclusion of managerial priorities and values in setting the direction of public services. And politicians desire more control over the professionals that dominate public services whilst, simultaneously, wanting to make them more responsible for outcomes (2003, p. 955).

They argue that these Strategies have to be transparent and to make sure the fact that resources will be allocated by the government to the institutions which are supposed to conduct their strategy (Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003, pp. 955-956).

Strategic planning is a subject discussed by scholars in the fields of both business and public administration. It is a process which is supposed to bring discipline while organizing and setting organizational goals, to define tasks and allocate resources, to establish monitoring and evaluation procedures, to evaluate and communicate results. It involves a set of concepts, procedures and tools in order to become an effective decision-making mechanism which mediates the interest of the organization, market, society and stakeholders. George Boyne and Julian Gould-Williams argue that “rational planning forces leaders to clarify their objectives, and thereby provides a framework for allocating resources in line with the purposes of the organization. Furthermore, the objectives can be communicated to all staff who can then channel their efforts accordingly” (Gould-Williams & Boyne, 2003, p. 116).

Strategic planning can be defined as “the process of determining the mission, major objectives, strategies, and policies that govern the acquisition and allocation of resources to achieve organizational aims” (Pearce *et al*, 1987, p. 658). Falshaw *et al*. refer to strategic planning as a form, a content or a process viewpoint, where the content is related to specific elements of the plan and the process is related to the “mechanisms for the development of the strategic plan and its subsequent deployment” (Ali, 2015, p. 2).

The relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance has been studied, yet without providing conclusive results. One reason might be the fact that different institutions have different performance indicators, according to the domain and overall context. As Albadri Ali points out, the success of an organization has been studied with

approaches from different disciplines and management approaches, which is why success and failure can be explained through various justifications and reasons (2015, p. 2). He specifically highlights: “the disagreement and the difference embed in the strategic planning and execution (organization performance) process which is showing the effectiveness and efficiency for each organization” (Ali, 2015, p. 2). By the same token, Ali cites Ansoff *et al.* (1970), who argue that “‘planners’ outperformed ‘non-planners’ in terms of conventional financial performance, such as profit margin and rate of return” (Ali, 2015, p. 2).

As Dibrell *et al.* demonstrate, formal strategic planning deals both with ends and means (2014, p. 2). The ends are represented through objectives and the means reflect the way in which they are met - like the discussions on how to distribute resources in a strategy (Dibrell *et al.*, 2014, p. 2). We can, thus, argue that strategic documents represent ends combined with means, as they imply a national plan

Building on this idea, Sue Llewellyn and Emma Tappin claim that ‘strategies’ represent greater devolved responsibility in the public sector for both acquiring resources and achieving results. They enable the inclusion of managerial priorities and values in setting the direction of public services (2003, p. 955). It means that the strategic documents have to meet a high-quality standard in order to ensure this function. To do so, they have to be prepared by people with polished strategic skills, in order to have effective plans at the end of the writing process.

An effective plan must be preceded by a consultation process and has to take place under specific management conditions. The lack of change management competencies can affect the execution of the overall plan, as it prevents new influences and transformations to be included in the strategy or prevents their correct implementation or evaluation. Business, structural, organizational, cultural changes and so forth are on the list of possible challenges that the management has to deal with. Therefore, the plan has to be designed in such a way that it can adapt to them.

Strategic planning and Performance

As mentioned above, in academic literature, the relationship between strategic planning and performance remains indecisive - it fluctuates from positive to negative conclusions, including no-effect relationship. A reason why this is an unsettled issue is the variety of domains in which the relationship is measured in, with their own implications and adaptation needs, different financial criteria. Albadri states that “the majority of studies and literature suggest the non-existence of this relationship. The impact of strategic planning instruments on operation organizational performance is varied and contradictory in instable environment. Some findings support this hypothesis, while others found it is difficult to formulate and implement a plan in such an environment (2015, p. 1).

Albadri Ali (2015, p. 3) notes that strategic planning could be described “as the process of using systematic criteria and rigorous investigation to formulate, implement, and control strategy, and formally document organizational expectations (cf. Higgins and Vincze, 1993; Mintzberg, 1994; Pearce and Robinson, 1994)”. The question that arises is whether it is possible to create a standard for these measurements, given the various unknown variables and their nature.

Glaister *et al* note that “empirical research in strategic planning systems has focused on two areas: the impact of strategic planning on firm performance and the role of strategic planning in strategic decision making (Grant, 2003, p. 492)” (Glaister *et al*, 2008, p. 369). This might lead to the conclusion that strategic planning has been examined not only with different tools and instruments, but for various purposes, making it challenging to read through the literature covering the subject.

According to Glaister *et al* (2007), performance implications of strategic planning process has been intensely studied for decades. These authors suggest possible negative implications due to the lack of flexibility and the presence of rigidity. This is often related to bureaucracy as being an impediment to the organizational activity, as it creates an environment where compliance and control skills are the most important. In such a setting, it is considered that innovativeness and collaboration activities are constrained or not encouraged. Therefore, strategic documents should incorporate this component of creating space for creative and collaborative activities, while also ensuring the path to reaching the settled objectives through the plan of activities proposed.

Huff and Reger are cited in Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003, p. 117) with their claim that some authors should be “chastised for advocating an overly heroic approach to strategic management and been too optimistic about the possibilities of synoptic rational analysis (1987: 215)”. Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003, p.117) relate the difficulties of creating a good plan on technical and political difficulties, where the first ones are about the demanding overall analysis which must be conducted, citing Streib and Poister who mention the “prodigious amounts of data concerning an organization’s strengths and weaknesses...and considerable management skill to utilize the resulting insights’ (1990: 31).”. The second ones are about the plan as an organizer of concentration and power of the institution, possibly leading to inconsistency.

Capon *et al* (1994 in Glaister *et al*, 2007, p. 369) argue that the greater the degree of sophistication of the planning process, the better the performance. This is why strategic planners should outperform planners from the financial sector, as the first ones can adapt to the environment and have formal thinking abilities as they settle strategic issues and allocate resources (Capon *et al*, 1994 in Glaister *et al*, 2007, p. 369).

Since strategic planning should be “explicit, rigorous and systematic” (Boyne & Gould-Williams, 2003, p. 116), the formal processes that give rise to the strategic tools, including the strategic documents, should be conceived by individuals who possess the knowledge and

skills to create the right version of such tools. The lack of these skills may lead to incomplete or improper final versions, which may have an effect on the overall organizational performance.

Formalism and compliance

Formalism and compliance are elements to be considered when discussing strategic planning, as they act on both the drafting and the implementation process and might have influence on the implementation process and outcome of the plan.

One of the most dangerous traps of bureaucracy is formalism - a concept used to “criticize legal thought and practice” (Stone, 2004, p. 1). It implies compliance to the rules which can have bad consequences when the objectives set are wrong. This is a major problem, as it may cause a strategy to lose its purpose since people involved will tend to conform to authority without considering conflicting, opposite or different aspects of the given task and simply acting according to requirements and rules.

This leads to another important aspect, which is the compliance - integrity relationship. The first one relies on external controls and works through instruments such as strict regulations and extensive powers. The second is based on internal control and implies interactivity in order to stimulate moral judgement of the public servant (Maesschalck, 2004, p. 22). Some authors underline the fact that the two elements are not part of a simple dichotomy, but rather they are complementary and that they should be considered complementary (p. 22). Another distinction deals with the idea of “responsible accountability” as opposed to the typically “mechanistic” and restrictive forms of accountability” (Maesschalck, 2004, p. 23). Based on this distinction, 4 styles of doing public management can be distinguished:

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TABLE 1
Four Styles of Doing Public Management

		Group	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Grid	High	Fatalist style	Hierarchist style
	Low	Individualist style	Egalitarian style

Note: Grid represents the extent to which individuals are constrained by rules, laws, and procedures. Group represents the extent to which individuals are embedded into social units.

(Maesschalck, 2004, p. 24).

The table combines the “who am I?” and ‘what shall I do?’ questions to create 4 dimensions: ‘hierarchy (high grid and high group), egalitarianism (low grid and high group), individualism (low grid and low group), and fatalism (high grid, low group)” (Maesschalck, 2004, p. 24).

This conceptualization might be helpful to analyze the way in which a strategy is created and how people bring input into the process, to which extent is that input necessary, how should the indicators be built and so on.

Trust vs control

With regards to the readiness of actors to follow the objectives of a strategy, there is another relevant distinction, which is the trust-control relationship. They influence each other. Hence, the point is to find out how to achieve the right type of control so that it does not reduce the level of trust and how to avoid losing control if too much trust is allocated without a set of rules attached.

As Geert Bouckaert stress it, trust is a “crucial element of performance and for a performing public sector” which can be separated in 3 subcategories: trust from society in the public sector (T1), from the public sector in society (T2) and within the public sector (T3) (2012, p. 91). Considering the fact that turbulent times have a big impact on trust, building and maintaining it becomes “even more important in a period of crises where the public sector needs to be a stronghold in the economy and in society (Van de Walle *et al.*, 2005)”, as the author suggests. All types of trust are relevant, but for this study we shall focus on T3, as it is the generator of strategic planning and the quality of the document is strongly related to the level of trust.

David Carnevale and Barton Wechsler identify characteristics on individual and organizational level regarding trust, out of the second category pertaining: job security, job characteristics, in-group status, openness to communication, fairness of rewards and punishment, opportunity to participate, ethical environment (1992, p. 575). There is a clear relationship between trust and control - if control is not ethically exercised, trust levels will fall.

Without trust there can only be formal collaboration, leading to a rather formalist way of interaction between actors. Cooperation and control have to be complementary, but also to be part of an integrated and “healthy” organizational culture, in order to generate trust and to ensure genuine commitment to the strategic objectives and means and to facilitate a quick and ethical decision-making and execution process while maintaining high levels of motivation. Similarly, control is an essential part of it, as it ensures monitoring and measurability of the activities and of the outputs and outcomes as depicted by the indicators of performance. Control should also be ethical in order to be legitimate.

Bottom-up approach

According to the literature, this approach represents a useful perspective when considering a strategy. Not only that it gives reasons to consolidate accountability among public servants, but it also permits access to decision for various stakeholders, especially when discussing strategies. Edward Long and Aimee Franklin (2004) quote Lester and Stewart's work by marking the difference between the two opposite approaches: "centralized process that tends to neglect strategic initiatives coming from ... other policy subsystems, 'whereas bottom-up implementation is a decentralized process in which policy is determined by the bargaining between members of the organization and their clients.'" (2004, p. 310).

The reason why the bottom-up approach is relevant for strategic planning aimed at improving public administration performance is because it may generate reasons for motivation and accountability, thus reducing the level of formalism and narrow compliance by making strategy drafting an engaging process.

Another reason could be linked to personnel commitment, for reasons identified by Kohtamaki:

"Strategy implementation mediates the link between participative strategic planning and company performance because participative strategic planning increases personnel understanding of the company's purpose and strategic targets, clarifies why strategies are implemented and creates a sense of shared purpose for employees" (Kohtamaki et al, 2011, p. 160).

This means that accountability and responsibility shall be reflected not only in the drafting of the document and in the implementation processes, but also in the meaning of the whole strategy, affecting the motivation levels of the public servants. Understanding the objectives is crucial to creating an environment where formalism is transformed into responsible, motivated participation.

Limits

There are, of course, some variables that we should be aware of. One of them is that "inconsistent demands are made on public services and they face what are, frequently, insoluble problems" (Llewellyn & Tappin, 2003, p. 957). This means that building a strategy becomes hard as requests and priorities might change and might affect a plan. Turbulent times can cause situations that might require changes in the original strategy, making strategic planning harder and harder to achieve.

A comprehensive study of such planning should also benefit from an analysis of the organization's structure, size and culture and of the environmental turbulence in order to correlate strategic planning with performance, according to Irhas Effendi and Titik Kusmantini (2015, p. 1136). All these factors have to do with both drafting the strategic planning document and later implementing it to some extent. Therefore, a close look at these

variables might be useful. However, when discussing central public administration, it is hard to keep track of all the organizations which are involved in the strategic process.

Another limit is related to the national culture. There are many classifications and approaches, among others Laskovia *et al* (2017, p. 4) or Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework (2001). All of them have one thing in common, thing that we should be aware of when studying strategy building - the common values shared and the way in which people act in certain collective challenges are related to culture and they have a strong impact in both strategic planning and performance.

Taking the perspective from collective to individual, another limit is linked to personnel commitment. As Kohtamaki *et al* underline,

“the impact of strategic planning is not direct, but the contribution of planning relies on the organizational integration that it generates. Particularly, the participative strategic planning facilitates strategic interactions, increases personnel comprehension about strategy, facilitates strategy implementation and hence enables the company to align its strategic targets and resources with the changing business environment” (2011, p. 161).

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