

## Emphasizing the Intrinsic Purpose of Public Administration: A Way Out of the Identity Crisis?

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Résumé de l'article

La crise d'identité de l'administration publique est, depuis longtemps, débattue dans la littérature académique. L'une des principales sources de cette prétendue crise est un questionnement idéologique et politique sur le rôle de l'administration publique. Dans cet article, nous soutenons qu'une façon de renforcer l'identité de l'administration publique est de revenir à la question fondamentale de son objectif. Afin de répondre à cette question, nous explorons le concept de *finalités* (purpose) et le relierons aux discussions théoriques philosophiques et politiques sur le but de l'État. Nous avançons deux types de finalités que nous appelons instrumentale et intrinsèque, le premier portant sur les effets de l'administration publique et le second sur sa nature propre. Nous concluons que le but instrumentale domine le discours contemporain et que cela contribue à entretenir la crise d'identité de l'administration publique. L'article se termine en suggérant qu'une plus grande attention portée à ses finalités intrinsèques contribuerait à nuancer la discussion.

# *Emphasizing the Intrinsic Purpose of Public Administration: A Way Out of the Identity Crisis?*

*By Lars Karlsson<sup>i</sup> and Angelica Börjesson<sup>ii</sup>*

## *Abstract*

There is a long-standing discussion, often framed in terms of a crisis, in the literature about the identity of public administration. One of the most salient roots of this alleged crisis is the ideological and political questioning of the role of public administration. We argue in this paper that a way of strengthening the identity of public administration is to reconnect to the fundamental question of its purpose. In order to answer this question, we explore the concept of purpose and relate it to the philosophical and political theoretical discussions about the purpose of the state. We find two kinds of purposes, which we term the instrumentalistic and the intrinsic. If public administration is assigned an instrumentalistic purpose, it is assessed as valuable if the consequences are valuable. If it is assigned an intrinsic purpose, it is assessed as valuable in itself. We conclude that the instrumentalistic purpose of public administration dominates contemporary discourse, and that this contributes to the identity crisis. The article ends with a suggestion that the intrinsic purpose of public administration be given a more salient position in the discussion.

*Keywords:* Public administration, identity, purpose, intrinsic, instrumentalistic

## *Résumé*

La crise d'identité de l'administration publique est, depuis longtemps, débattue dans la littérature académique. L'une des principales sources de cette prétendue crise est un questionnement idéologique et politique sur le rôle de l'administration publique. Dans cet article, nous soutenons qu'une façon de renforcer l'identité de l'administration publique est de revenir à la question fondamentale de son objectif. Afin de répondre à cette question, nous explorons le concept de *fins* (purpose) et le relierons aux discussions théoriques philosophiques et politiques sur le but de l'État. Nous avançons deux types de fins que nous appelons instrumentaliste et intrinsèque, le premier portant sur les effets de l'administration publique et le second sur sa nature propre. Nous concluons que le but instrumentaliste domine le discours contemporain et que cela contribue à entretenir la crise d'identité de l'administration publique. L'article se termine en suggérant qu'une plus grande attention portée à ses fins intrinsèques contribuerait à nuancer la discussion.

*Mots-clés:* Administration publique, identité, intention, intrinsèque, instrumentaliste

## Introduction

Public administration is often claimed to be suffering from an identity crisis. Related discussion has been ongoing for decades and has come to identify several roots of the alleged crisis. At least three such roots are identified in the literature. Two are older and seemingly inherent, while one is more recent, stemming from external conditions. The first root questions the field's status as a science. This questioning is related, first, to the alleged duality of public administration as both an art and a science, and, second, to the multiplicity of theories, concepts, and methods that borrow from other fields. The result is an ongoing discussion of whether public administration has a firm and independent scientific basis, or lacks the necessary prerequisites of a coherent social science scientific field (Farazmand, 2012; Haque, 1996; Kettle, 2000; Raadschelders, 2011; Zalmanovitch, 2014).

The second root of the identity crisis is the complex relationship between politics and administration. This matter is normative as well as empirical, and it has a contextual dimension in that there are stark differences between, for example, the North American and continental European traditions regarding the role of public administration in the political system and in political thought (cf. Painter & Peters, 2010).

The third root of the identity crisis is the ideological and political questioning of the role of public administration that has prevailed since at least the 1970s. Neoliberal ideas underlying this critique have achieved an almost hegemonic position in much of the world, contributing greatly to the hostility toward public administration (Schmidt & Thatcher, 2013). Neoliberal ideas have combined with policy ideas and reforms such as New Public Management (NPM), which also portrays public administration, at least in its traditional form, as inherently inferior to market actors. This alleged inferiority has contributed to skepticism of the role of public administration in a globalized world dominated by market logic (Haque, 1996).

What is a way out of this alleged identity crisis? Our attempt to answer this question, which is constitutive for the field of public administration, is to use the predominantly external questioning of public administration as a tool. Accordingly, we choose to engage with the third root of the identity crisis, i.e., the ideological and political questioning of public administration. This approach assumes that external attacks can sometimes be beneficial in the sense of strengthening the identity of the attacked. Ideological or rhetoric attacks from the outside might, in other words, be used to refine the purpose of the object of the attacks. One logical way of strengthening the object's identity or refining its purpose is to revisit the most fundamental questions relating to the object's *raison d'être*.

On a fundamental level, why does the object exist? In other words, *what is the purpose of public administration?*

That question concerns the professional practice as well as the academic field, meaning that the concept of public administration in this article denotes both. This use of the concept is part of the article's approach of treating public administration as a distinct phenomenon originating from the interplay of scholarship and public sector activity.

To answer this question, we consider the literature discussing the status or *raison d'être* of public administration. Our conclusion is that any viable defence of public administration or strengthening of its identity should engage with its normative foundations, something too rarely done. The second section explores the concept of purpose as a normative concept relating to the long-standing philosophical and political theoretical discussion of the purpose of the state. In the second and third sections of the paper, two different types of purposes related to public administration are identified, *holistic* and *individualistic*. We conclude that one can distinguish two ideas expressing two purposes of public administration. Based on their divergent relationships with values, these two ideas are called the *intrinsic* and the *instrumentalistic* purposes of public administration.

In the fourth section, these ideas are discussed in the light of the identity crisis in public administration. The conclusion is that the instrumentalistic idea strongly dominates both the political discourse and the academic literature. Moreover, we argue that this dominance contributes to the identity crisis in public administration. The paper concludes with a suggestion that the intrinsic purpose of public administration should be given a more salient position in the field.

## **1. Existing Answers to the Critique of Public Administration**

Alongside the persistent critique and questioning of public administration, numerous lines of defence can be grouped into three different categories, ranging from weakest to strongest. The first and weakest response to the critique is what we call the *pragmatic* defence. This argument defends public administration from the critique by denying the alleged inherent and generic inferiority of public administration. The second response is what we call the *publicness* argument, which ascribes a more positive role to public administration relative to other societal actors in certain areas. The third response, the *value* argument, points to inherent values in public administration, and it is here that we find the most promising basis for a normatively convincing argument in support of public administration. At a more fundamental level, the arguments fall into two different types, where the first and the second responses form one type and the third response another. The main difference is that the third response, in contrast to the first and second, points

to qualities inherent in public administration, separating it from other types of organizations.

The weakest of the above defences, the pragmatic defence, is not an argument in favor of public administration *per se*. What it argues, and as such qualifies it as a defence, is that public administration is not inherently inferior to other options. The core of the argument is that *it depends*—that is, whether public administration or, for example, market actors are preferable depends on context and specific situation. In some contexts, a private provider may deliver better schooling, waste collection, security, health care, or some other kind of service than a public provider; in other contexts, public providers are superior. Briefly, the argument is that it is not the type of organization that matters, but the quality of the output. Parts of the literature support this argument with empirical results of, for example, privatization in different contexts (Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000).

This pragmatic approach is aligned with many prevailing ideas about the organization and provision of services. With some qualifications in mind, it is not directly opposed to, for example, ideas based on NPM or governance. Public administration is treated as preferable providing it delivers the best results in a specific context (Christensen & Laegreid, 2001; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pierre & Peters, 2000).

The second line of defence of public administration identified in the literature is the *publicness* argument, which is based on the premise that there are certain goods that the market or civil society cannot provide on its own. Such collective goods include security, public infrastructure, and various kinds of communication infrastructure that demand large investments. The required investments are so extensive, and the potential benefits so uncertain, that the only societal actor that can provide these goods is public administration. The argument is sometimes phrased in terms of market failure—i.e., in certain situations in which the free market cannot deliver what is in the public interest, public administration plays a decisive role (Pesch, 2008).

This line of argument is based on several ideological assumptions that undermine it as a viable defence of public administration. One of the most salient ideological assumptions is the description of society as a well-functioning market society separated from, and whose existence precedes that of the state. This assumption, however, is ideological and does not accurately describe how a market economy works. There are no empirical cases of such free-market societies with clear demarcation lines between state and market. The free market is always, to varying degrees, dependent on the workings of the state (Steinberger, 2004). Polanyi (1957) even characterized this idea of a totally free market as a “stark utopia,” one with potentially harmful effects on both society and nature.

The third type of defence of public administration identified in the literature is what we call the *value* defence. Unlike the other two defences, this refers to qualities or values inherent in public administration, meaning that public administration carries or embodies values distinct from those of other kind of organizations. The literature often emphasizes participation as such a value. Public administration can offer participatory arrangements that give citizens a true voice in the organization and provide delivery of services, and, at the same time, stimulate public participation, thereby contributing to a more lively democracy. This can be contrasted with the participatory arrangements that market organizations offer, which are limited to individualistic consumer behaviour (Fredrickson, 1982; Pesch, 2008; Stivers, 1990). Other values inherent in public administration, besides participatory value, can be legality, equality, and impartiality.

These three lines of argument show that there are two fundamentally different types of arguments in favour of public administration. One type assumes that there is nothing special about public administration relative to other kinds of organizations (e.g., private enterprises). The only distinctive characteristic is funding through compulsory taxes that give public administration a special role when it comes to goods and services that market actors cannot or will not provide. The other type of argument points to qualities inherent in public administration that give it a distinct character and value relative to other kinds of organizations. This means that the value of public administration lies in its existence as such, and is not contingent on anything external. Our point is that this quality can only be discerned by applying a normative perspective that can discern the values inherent in public administration.

## 2. The Concept of Purpose

One way of applying a normative perspective is by the use of certain concepts. In this paper, we use the concept of "purpose" to this end. We argue that purpose can cast light on the normative foundations of institutions and, consequently, be used as an asset in endeavouring to strengthen the identity of public administration, depending on certain assumptions regarding language and its relation with epistemology. From a traditional positivistic viewpoint, language is perceived as mirroring reality. This conception is a fundamental building block in correspondence theory, according to which concepts are used to the degree that they correspond to objects in the world "out there" (i.e., reality). There is something outside of us, something for which we are trying to find corresponding language or precise concepts. The scientific task is to construct a neutral language and concepts that correspond as exactly as possible to reality (Taylor, 2016).

An alternate view sees language itself as reality. In this perspective, there is no reality "out there" for which we are struggling to find corresponding concepts—or at least there

is no reality that we will ever be able to capture precisely using language or scientific methods. In an extreme form, this epistemological view entails a constructivist perception of the world in which the scientific task is reduced to analyses of concepts, symbols, and representations (Fischer, 2003; Taylor, 2016; cf. Riccucci, 2010).

The assumption on which this article is based is located somewhere in between these two epistemological positions. Language is assumed to contribute to our understanding of reality, which we can never grasp in its entirety. However, language is also assumed to shape, at least partially, what we perceive as reality. This epistemological stance gives us latitude to use and launch new concepts in order to understand phenomena more fully. Concepts used in a new context or setting can yield new insights into and understanding of a specific phenomenon. They do that by making us see, and perhaps even construct, reality in a slightly different way from before. A new concept does not simply reflect the reality, but contributes to our understanding of reality, while at least partly constructing it in a different way (cf. Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Burrell, 1992; Sloterdijk, 2016). Steinberger (2004) argued similarly in his work on the idea of state, in which he brought forward the thesis that the state can best be understood as a structure of intelligibility.

This paper assumes that the concept of purpose can play this role in relation to public administration. This assumption is in turn based on the observation that purpose has never been used systematically in the literature in relation to public administration. By relating what in this context is a new concept to public administration, we may be able to perceive new aspects of public administration. Asking the question "What is the purpose of public administration?" forces us to think about public administration in potentially new ways, eventually leading to a new understanding of the phenomenon. The use of "potentially" and "eventually" conveys the exploratory aim of this paper.

The concept of purpose contains a specific quality that increases the likelihood of understanding public administration in a new way. Purpose directs attention to normative issues by being inherently connected to the question of "why?" "What is the purpose of that object?" is equivalent to asking "Why does that object exist?" The answers to these questions create opportunities to ascribe meaning to the phenomenon, for an object with a purpose cannot be meaningless. The question of what this purpose is, what meaning it has, ineluctably directs attention to normative issues.

The normative character of the concept of purpose can also be illustrated by contrasting it with two adjacent concepts, function and reason. These concepts can often be used interchangeably with purpose. To state that "the function of object X is Y" is, in many ways, equivalent to saying that "the purpose of X is Y." In both cases, X receives an explanation for its existence (i.e., Y). There is, however, an important difference between

the concepts. A function does not include any intention and therefore has no agent, so X can have the function Y without anyone intending so. It is a neutral concept lacking any normative or intentional aspects. On the other hand, saying that X has the purpose of Y implies an intention of some kind, and therefore the involvement of agents (cf. Schueler, 2003).

But what about reason? Does that not also include human agency and intention? The major difference between reason and purpose lies in the scope and kind of rationality involved. Reason is more limited in scope than purpose and belongs exclusively to the sphere of instrumental rationality. An actor must be instrumentally rational in order to have a reason for something. Purpose, on the other hand, incorporates this rationality but also entails an interpretive rationality (March & Olsen, 1989). Being the bearer of a purpose could involve an interpretive effort within a meaningful totality—something is ascribed a purpose given the background existence of a totality carrying meaning. To have a purpose in this sense, in relation to some meaningful totality, is on the individual level connected to motivation. To sense a purpose, then, is to be motivated.

This aspect of purpose directs attention toward its inherent connection with identity, which takes us back to the overall problem addressed here, i.e., the alleged identity crisis of public administration. To be the bearer of a strong sense of purpose entails prerequisites for a pronounced identity. The purpose directs meaning and direction toward an agent or an object. If public administration is thus ascribed an express purpose, it would accordingly be beneficial for the maintenance of a pronounced identity.

The relationship between the concept of purpose, a normative dimension and identity, has therefore, at least tentatively, been established. One way out of the alleged identity crisis of public administration would be to ascribe to it an express purpose. But what kind of purpose, and what does it more concretely mean to ascribe a purpose to public administration? The obvious way forward would be to refer to the literature on the purpose of public administration. However, because there has been no such discussion in the literature, that way forward is blocked.

This gap permits engagement with an adjacent literature, that which discusses the purpose of the state. The rationale behind engagement with this literature does not stop with filling this gap. An even more important reason is both theoretical and epistemological, and relates to the inherent relationship between the state and public administration in that the latter is inexorably a part of the former. Rutgers (2008), for example, emphasized a need for a theory of the state in public administration because public administration is a practical and often narrow exercise that risks being compartmentalized. Relating to a theory of the state, then, is a way of providing public



administration a more coherent analytical framework. Rutgers' (2008) suggestion points to the demarcation line between public administration as practice, carried out by employees of the state, and as field of study in need of an identity.

### **3. The State and Public Administration**

Despite being one of the most central concepts in political thought, the state is ineluctably elusive. This elusiveness can be explained in various ways, ranging from differing status and use in different geographical contexts and political traditions to the inherently normative character of the concept (Dyson, 1980). One of many explanations for this conceptual confusion concerns the division between definitions of the state as just one distinct institution among others in society and definitions equating the state with the political community as a whole—what is sometimes referred to as *the commonwealth*. The first definition is often used in legal and administrative discourse, contrasting the state with, for example, local governments or actors in other societal spheres, such as the market or civil society. This definition is common in liberal thought, constituting an important prerequisite for the dividing line between the allegedly free sphere of civil society (often including the market) and the potentially oppressive and threatening state (Steinberger, 2004).

In the second definition, the concept of the state is used in the same way as ancient Greek writers such as Aristotle did when speaking about the city state or *polis*. In this usage or definition, the state does not constitute a distinct institution with clear boundaries demarcating it from other societal spheres. Instead, the state comprises the whole—i.e., the entire political community or commonwealth. Steinberger (2004) argued, for example, that the state is an idea that, as in the Aristotelian view, comprises the whole of the political community. In this conception, the mostly liberal argument that there are spheres besides the state, preferentially civil society and the free market, is ontologically wrong. There are no spheres outside of the state, or, rather, there are no spheres where the idea of the state is absent. The “free” spaces or spheres that the state should avoid, according to much liberal thinking, do not exist (Steinberger, 2004).

Steinberg (2004) argued that the state is an overarching normative idea of the prevailing order—i.e., what we as citizens can and cannot do. This normative ideational order is inescapable if we want to live in an ordered society. This means that we must determine what this order allows or does not allow, even in civil society or the market (Steinberger, 2004).

But the state surely cannot be just an idea. What about institutions such as parliament, agencies, and courts? The rules and laws that regulate society? Or the physical features of the state, such as buildings and public employees? These are, of course, part of the

state, but it is unreasonable to say, for example, that public buildings such as courts and parliaments are the state. They are institutional and physical features of the state, but, as Blyth (2003) put it, "structures do not come with an instruction sheet." That is, the physical and institutional features of the state must be interpreted in order to make sense, and that is where the idea of the state becomes relevant. We interpret and make sense of the institutional and physical appearances of the state through an already-present idea of the state (Steinberger, 2004).

#### **4. The Purpose of the State**

So what does this mean for the question of the purpose of the state? In what follows, we show that there are two kinds of purposes of the state: one based on a substantial definition of the common good, and one where the common good is based on a constructivist view. The first consideration is that the concept of the purpose of the state can only be relevant when speaking about the state in Steinberger's sense—i.e., the state as equivalent to a commonwealth or the political community as a whole. To speak about the purpose of the state in the broad sense is also a way of exploring the idea of the state as an overarching normative idea. As Steinberger argued, public administration can be perceived as the concrete instrument of this ideational and normative aspect of the state. Perceived in this way, public administration, one of the institutional features of the state, derives its normative status and foundation from the overarching idea of the state (Steinberg, 2004; Rutgers, 2008; Tijsterman, 2008).

Spicer (2004) implicitly used this definition in a critique of what he termed "the purposeful state." The idea of the state as a purposeful organization implies, according to Spicer, a view of the state as striving for a substantial common good. This common good, in turn, entails a collectivistic idea of monolithic value that has negative connotations in a democratic society. This monolithic value becomes inevitably oppressive in that it is forced upon individuals. The idea of the common good in this definition overlooks the existence of individual aspirations and values. Spicer (2004) essentially argued that a state based upon this substantial common good is repressive (cf. Emmet, 1958).

Critics have asked whether Spicer and others might not have overlooked the possibility of a democratic construction of the common good. In a democratic society, the common good does not necessarily have to be a monolithic value forced upon the various aspirations and values within society. It might well be the result of democratic and deliberative processes in which citizens participate in an enlightened discussion of the purpose of both the state and the common good (Tijsterman, 2008). This distinction relates to problems entailed in Rousseau's famous discussion about the common good

and the general will. In Rousseau, we also find the tensions between the common interest or the common good and the individual's interests and aspirations (Rousseau, 1983).

The democratic and deliberative version of the purpose of the state and the common good, however, is not necessarily convincing. Why talk about the purpose of the state and common good at all? In a democracy the majority wins, and it is the will of the majority that constitutes the moral basis of policies. Notions of the purpose of the state and the common good imply that the whole population supports them. However, a large minority might oppose them. It is obvious that two different kinds of common good and purposes of the state are in play. One kind is the one that Spicer criticizes, namely a fairly explicit and substantial common good and purpose of the state. This substantial common good, constructed by the rulers of the state, is neutrally implemented by public administration in a way that impels Spicer to characterize public administration as instrumental. This type of common good could also be derived from democratic processes, but is still a fairly explicit kind of common good. It is a common good that can be implemented (Spicer, 2004).

This first type of common good might or might not be normatively desirable, but according to critics such as Spicer, this is not desirable in a democratic state. There is, however, another type of purpose of the state and common good that is more implicit. Tijsterman (2008) argued, for example, that "every functioning society therefore has an implicit notion of the common good, though different states construe this in different ways." This second type of purpose and common good does not involve a normative view of desirability, but more of an ontological view of what constitutes a political community. Tijsterman's (2008) comment permits a more constructivist view of the purpose of the state, in that a purpose always underlies every existing state. This argument brings us back to the view, pursued by Steinberger (2004), of the state as an idea and of public administration as being the concrete instrument of this idea. The state as an idea entails a purpose of the state, from which public administration derives its normative foundations. The question then arises as to what kinds of purposes of the state can be constructed by different states.

## **5. Individualistic and Holistic Ideas of the State**

The international politics scholar Reus-Smit (1999) claimed that different states are associated with different moral purposes. These moral purposes are part of what he called the constitutional structures of the state. These structures, of which the moral purpose of the state is the most fundamental, are meta values deeply embedded in different types of states. They are not necessarily shared by everyone in a given political community, but consist of what Reus-Smit termed hegemonic beliefs. These moral

purposes of the state were present in the historical societies Reus-Smit discussed in relation to the political community as a whole. They are, in other words, based on a holistic social ontology. Reus-Smit distinguished these historical societies from what he called "modern society." In modern society, the moral purpose of the state is to augment an individual's purposes and potentialities. This moral purpose clearly differs from those of past societies in that it is based on an individualist social ontology. The individual, not a collective, is the main moral subject (Reus-Smit, 1999).

The emergence of modern individualism, often based on a view of the individual as rational and utility-maximizing, is, however, continuously challenged by ideas and beliefs based on a holistic social ontology. There are explicitly anti-individualistic ideologies like communism and fascism, as well as ideologies that include both collective and individualistic ideas like social democracy and conservatism. In other words, the moral purpose of the state, at least since the Enlightenment, has had nuanced manifestations, oscillating between holistic and individualistic stances (Bobbio, 1990).

We therefore see the purpose of the state as consisting of various aspects. The moral purpose that Reus-Smit discussed relates to states in the international system sharing the same moral foundations. It points toward two different conceptions or ideas of the state, one holistic and the other atomistic (cf. Bobbio, 1990). As we have argued, however, these different conceptions of the state exist side by side in modern society. Ideas based on a holistic conception of the state flourish beside ideas based on an atomistic conception of the state.

## **6. An Instrumentalistic Purpose of Public Administration**

As argued above, public administration can be perceived as the concrete instrument of the dominant idea of the state. As such, it derives its normative character from this idea, which fluctuates between atomistic and holistic ideals. To ask about the purpose of public administration, then, is to ask about its normative role or meaning based on its relationship with a specific, dominant idea of the state. The contrasting atomistic and holistic ideas of the state can be perceived as representing two different normative logics. That is, they represent two different normative worldviews entailing different relationships between the individual and the state and different logics of motivation. These normative worldviews can be explored and discussed from a range of perspectives. To derive the various purposes of public administration, we will use the distinctions between a contractual and communitarian relationship with the state, between a logic of consequentialism and of appropriateness, and between intrinsic and extrinsic values. These are gained from different parts of the literature, having different concepts and theoretical roots, but capturing essentially the same distinctions.

The individualistic idea of the state entails a contractual relationship between the individual and the state. Early liberal thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke explicitly argued from an idea of a contract between rational and utility-maximizing individuals and the state. While very few believe that such a contract has been “signed,” the normative idea of a contractual relationship between the individual and the state is very much alive. At the heart of this idea lies the assumption that the relationship between the state and the individuals is rationally regulated, codified in terms of rights and duties. A relationship based on a contract is logically conditional, valid to the degree that the terms are not breached (Hampton, 1988).

This idea of a contractual relationship between the individual and the state can also be viewed from the perspective of two contrasting normative logics found in March and Olsen (1989), consequentialism and appropriateness, with the former being inherent in an individualistic idea of the state. This logic of consequentialism entails a rationalistic utility-maximizing logic and motivation on the part of individuals. Rational individuals can establish and rank their preferences, calculating the best and most efficient means of achieving them. The sole motivation of individuals is self-interest, and it is on their rational calculations that individuals base their actions.

Finally, ideas of the state can be viewed from the perspective of values. In the literature on ethics, it is common to distinguish two kinds of values, intrinsic and extrinsic (e.g., Frankena, 1973). Intrinsic values are conceived as good in and of themselves—i.e., they are considered good without necessarily being connected to some valuable consequence. Extrinsic values, on the other hand, are considered good only because they lead to something valuable. Extrinsic values are sometimes also referred to as instrumental values.

Given the contractual relationship with the state, combined with the rationalistic utility-maximizing motivations of individuals, the individualistic idea can be said to entail an instrumental conception of the state. That is, rational individuals perceive the state and its concrete instrument, public administration, as instruments for securing their preferences. In terms of purpose, we refer to this an instrumentalistic purpose of public administration. From this perspective, public administration is solely valuable because it helps individuals fulfill their goals. As an institution, it is perceived as neutral, a value-free instrument for securing the goods that individuals desire. The relationship between the individual and public administration can be expressed as contractual and conditional. Consequently, the parts of public administration become interchangeable with other organizations. Public administration has no valuable role or status in itself, but only in its ability to secure values outside itself.

More concrete examples of this individualistic idea of the state and the attribution of an instrumentalistic value to public administration can be found in the ideas underlying NPM and public choice. These clusters of ideas, which sprang from different contexts, share salient assumptions assigning an instrumentalistic purpose to public administration. The most significant assumption is the individualistic assumption, namely, that the individual is a rational utility maximizer. These theories explicitly state that the only motivational force is self-interest. Bureaucrats are assumed to be driven by the supreme goal of maximizing their budgets and expanding their organization (Niskanen, 1971; cf. Downs, 1966; Buchanan & Tullock, 1962).

One consequence of a strictly instrumentalistic conception of the purpose of public administration is that public administration loses specific characteristics. In other words, there is nothing special about public administration compared to other kinds of organizations. Another consequence is that bureaucrats are not perceived as fundamentally different from members of other kinds of organizations, such as private enterprises. Their single goal is understood to be implementing policies as efficiently as possible. Their motivational forces are the same (e.g., wages, promotion, and power) as in private sector organizations. The role of the bureaucrat remains essentially the same, however, with the practical consequence that bureaucratic tasks can now be contracted out. The result of these ideas is a pragmatic view of organization, where instrumentality is the overarching value, meaning that it does not matter who executes a policy as long as its goals are fulfilled. An empirical result is the mixed welfare state, in which public and private service providers and organizations are interchangeable. The instrumentalistic purpose of public administration is therefore aligned with the two weaker defences of public administration discussed above.

## **7. The Intrinsic Purpose of Public Administration**

The holistic idea of the state entails a relationship between individuals and the state fundamentally different from that of the individualistic idea, a relationship that could be described as communitarian. Such a relationship is premised on the ontological existence and normative precedence of the whole over the parts. This means that a community of some kind, which could be a city state or a nation state, is perceived as a meaningful whole that in certain ways is necessary for the construction of the individual. The individual obtains her/his identity through the culture, language, and shared meanings and understandings of the community. There is simply no individual who could rationally choose to negotiate and draw up a contract with the state. Rather, the individual exists as a person through belonging to and active involvement with a meaningful whole (Taylor, 1977, 2016).

The normative logic of the holistic idea is more in line with the logic of appropriateness than the logic of consequentialism that characterizes the individualistic idea of the state. This means that the processes underlying individual reasoning and actions are more about interpretation than calculation. The whole is seen as embodying meaning and symbols that the individual must interpret and relate to in order to obtain an identity, a basis for action, and a rational reasoning (March & Olsen, 1989).

In this context or idea of the state, the standing of values differs from that in the individualistic idea of the state and the logic of consequentialism. Since the community or the whole has an ontological and normative status in itself, outside the preferences and goals of the constitutive individuals, intrinsic values are much more salient. Institutions seen as embodiments of the whole obtain intrinsic value—they are valuable in themselves due to being intrinsic parts of the meaningful whole.

This means that in a holistic idea of the state, public administration can, at least potentially, be seen as embodying intrinsic value. Being part of a meaningful whole, public administration carries meaning and symbolic value that individuals need in order to sustain the community or context necessary for their freedom. The intrinsic value ascribed to the different parts of public administration makes them less interchangeable with other kinds of organizations. This is crucial from the perspective of identity, as being less interchangeable is potentially vital for a distinct identity. Based on these characteristics, in a holistic idea of the state, public administration can be perceived as having intrinsic purpose.

Concrete expressions of the intrinsic purpose of public administration can be found in various contexts and ideas. They are rarely as explicitly and systematically expressed as are ideas that promote the instrumentalistic purpose of public administration. Perhaps the most prominent expression of this argument can be found in relation to the Weberian type of bureaucracy. This well-known kind of organization is characterized as hierarchical, strictly and legally rule-based, and meritocratic. The bureaucrats inhabiting this kind of organization are supposed to implement detailed rules in a neutral and impartial manner (Weber, 1947).

The Weberian bureaucracy has increasingly been perceived in a negative light, its most serious flaws being supposed rigidity and, consequently, inefficiency. The hierarchical and strictly rule-based character of the organization is perceived as particularly ill-suited to an increasingly heterogeneous, rapidly changing, globalized, and market-based society with a demanding, competent, and individualistic citizenry. The comparison with other kinds of organizations, allegedly more flexible, efficient, and responsive to the

diverse and changing demands of citizens, supposedly leaves the Weberian bureaucracy in the shadow (Olsen, 2006).

However, this verdict is based on the assignment of an instrumentalistic purpose to public administration. The Weberian bureaucracy's efficiency in reaching external goals is compared unfavourably with its competitors. However, as Olsen (2006) stressed, the Weberian model can be viewed from another perspective, an institutional one. By conceiving the Weberian bureaucracy as an institution, it is seen as part of a context, as embodying values and symbols. The most important values a bureaucracy embodies derive from the neutral and impartial implementation of detailed legal rules—i.e., legality, impartiality, and equal treatment. These values are inherent in the model, meaning that it is impossible to replace the model without risking eroding these values (Olsen, 2006). These properties of the model make it possible to assign to it an intrinsic purpose. The purpose of the Weberian bureaucratic model can be conceived as inherent in the way it is fashioned and not (at least not only) by what it achieves in terms of reaching external goals. This view of the Weberian bureaucracy is in line with the value argument discussed in the section presenting the various defences of public administration.

Fukuyama (2014) has argued in a similar vein, presenting what can be perceived as an empirical extension of the intrinsic purpose of the Weberian bureaucracy. In his work on the historical development of the modern state and political order, Fukuyama (2014) explicitly emphasized the importance of a well-ordered public administration for the stability and functioning of democracy, as well as for most indicators of a liveable society. However—and this is the point here—in societies rated highest on these indicators, Northern European and the Scandinavian countries, public administration has to a degree been perceived as possessing an intrinsic purpose.

## **Conclusion**

Although individualistic and holistic ideas of the state exist side by side even today, it is beyond doubt that individualistic ideas and, consequently, an instrumentalistic conception of the purpose of public administration dominate. The hegemony of neoliberal ideas for more than three decades, combined with intensified globalization and marketization, has led to an extreme version of public administration with a strictly instrumentalistic purpose. The German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck (2016) argued that whereas the market used to be part of the sphere of the state, now the state is part of the market sphere (cf. Crouch, 2004).



Among the effects of this instrumentalization of the purpose of public administration is the erosion of particular values and characteristics inherent in public administration. The result, completely in line with the underlying ideas of neoliberalism and public choice, is that public administration is now perceived as a strictly neutral organization among other competing organizations in a market. The constructivist stance taken in the article can be combined with the Gramscian concept of hegemony in a way that sees the instrumentalization of public administration as a result of the dominance of the state by distinct social forces (Forgacs, 2000; cf. Galbraith, 1967).

Returning to the identity crisis in public administration, the conclusion drawn with the help of the concept of purpose is straightforward—the assignment of an instrumentalistic purpose erodes any pretences of identity. Having and sustaining an identity requires defining characteristics and a context in which the identity can resonate. The individualistic idea of the state and the corresponding assignment of an instrumentalistic purpose to public administration counteract any emergence of a genuine identity of public administration.

The instrumentalistic purpose assigned to public administration also has consequences for the academic field of public administration studies. Pollitt (2016) noted, for example, that much of the research in this field is more superficial, narrower, and more focused on abstract concepts such as governance. Less research addresses substantive policy questions, long-term historical developments, and the values and context of public administration, all areas with potential to ascribe an intrinsic purpose to public administration.

The result has been the increasing managerialization and instrumentalization of the field, leaving behind much of what once characterized classic public administration studies. The causes of this trend are, of course, multiple, including the marketization of higher education and research, as well as increasing pressures to publish, which has led to more superficial research. From the perspective applied here, the purpose of the university as an institution can also be said to have changed, similar to how public administration has changed.

So, what is the remedy for the identity crisis of public administration? Given the notion of purpose introduced here, the remedy would be to emphasize the importance of the changing emphasis in public administration. An instrumentalistic purpose is, of course, the core of public administration—public administration exists to serve as an instrument in reaching political goals. However, for the reasons discussed here, both normative and empirical, this cannot be the sole purpose of public administration. Focusing on the intrinsic purpose of public administration will cast light on the inherent values of public

administration as well as its valuable contribution to democracy and societal thriving. An important task of both scholars and practitioners will be stressing the intrinsic purpose of public administration. As we see it, this is the way forward with respect to the alleged identity crisis.

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