

# How people are educated about public policy worldwide

In regulated states, when making and adopting public policy decisions, it is insisted that it should be evidence based public policy. The proper definition of a problem, of desired changes and goals, data collection, consulting, consideration of options and comparing their effects are common steps that preceded the adoption of political decisions on the direction and measures of public policy. The result of this process is that it can be argued with a particular degree of reliability that a certain measure of public policy would lead to a certain outcome. This, in addition to avoiding the adoption of (wrong) decisions based on perceptions, superficial assessments or anecdotal evidence, enables stakeholders to understand the logic of state intervention and to monitor the outcome of public policy measures.

For countries like Serbia, the introduction of a systematic approach to public policy is of particular importance. This would prevent unnecessary state intervention, allow for a better allocation of scarce resources and faster economic growth. Such an approach implies that several prerequisites have been met.

1. The first one relates to the legal and political context. In this respect, Serbia has taken the first step by passing the Law on the Planning System, for the first time detailing the public policy decision-making process.
2. The second prerequisite is that there are human resources that can apply such a framework, or in the case of Serbia, use at least elementary forms of analysis. In the first period certainly, the public administration cannot be expected to carry out sophisticated public policy analyses. After all, in significantly more developed countries or at the European Union level, usually academic institutions and civil or private sector, are engaged in complex areas and public policy matters. What is possible and desirable is to insist on applying simple concepts and following basic steps when formulating public policy. Too complex rules and rigorous requirements for conducting analysis can make the new legal framework a dead letter.
3. The third prerequisite is that there are educational programmes in the field of public policy analysis. Recent studies on the implementation of scientific results in the field of social sciences in the process of **public policy making**, as well as on the system of research in the **social sciences**, point to a significant gap between research and policy-making processes. There is a similar gap in the area of educational programmes in the field of public policy making.

Building analytical capacity in public administration is a lengthy process. Regardless of whether public policy analysis is conducted inside or outside the state administration, the said analysis requires adequate human resources, both within the state administration itself, and in the research (academic) community and civil society. We have already noted that in Serbia not enough attention is paid to this area, both in research and in education itself. Currently, at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade, there is a Master's programme Public Administration, Local Self-

Government and Public Policy, where Public Policy Analysis is studied as an optional subject, while the Faculty of Organizational Sciences is pursuing a Master Management in Administration, which teaches Management Research Methods. Both programmes also contain a range of subjects (for example, sector policies in the first, i.e. research seminar and quantitative methods in public administration, in the second master) related to public policy analysis. In addition, at the Faculty of Economics and Law Faculty of Belgrade University, a number of disciplines are studied that contain elements of public policy analysis. Although all of the programmes and courses mentioned contribute to the development of students' analytical capacities, a programme dedicated to public policy analysis is lacking. The question is how such a programme should look like.

Public policy analysis is a relatively young discipline the main characteristic of which is interdisciplinarity. It was first studied as a separate area during the 1970s, when a postgraduate programme was introduced at **Rand Graduate School**. In Europe, these programmes began to develop in the late 1980s as a result of the development of the new public management **paradigm**.

Unlike a number of other disciplines in the social sciences where there is an established list of key areas studied in such programmes, this is not the case when it comes to public policy analysis. Similarities and differences in the formation of these **programmes** are still due to several factors.

Based on a thorough analysis of more than 25 different master programmes in public policy and public administration offered at leading universities in EU Member States, more than 80 different names of the courses have been identified. Behind different names, the same subject matter is often studied, and vice versa, behind the same names, curricula often reveal significant differences between the topics covered and the competences students acquire. These of course, are not the only differences. The status of compulsory subjects in terms of number and area varies significantly depending on the managerial or analytical specialisation of the programme.

Compulsory courses, on the one hand, provide an introduction to key theoretical concepts, while on the other, they use case studies and the application of theoretical knowledge and methods in practice. In order to determine the least common denominator of compulsory subjects, when analysing the aforementioned subjects on the basis of the curriculum, they were classified into four areas: (1) public policy making and analysis; (2) research methods; (3) economic analysis; (4) public administration management.

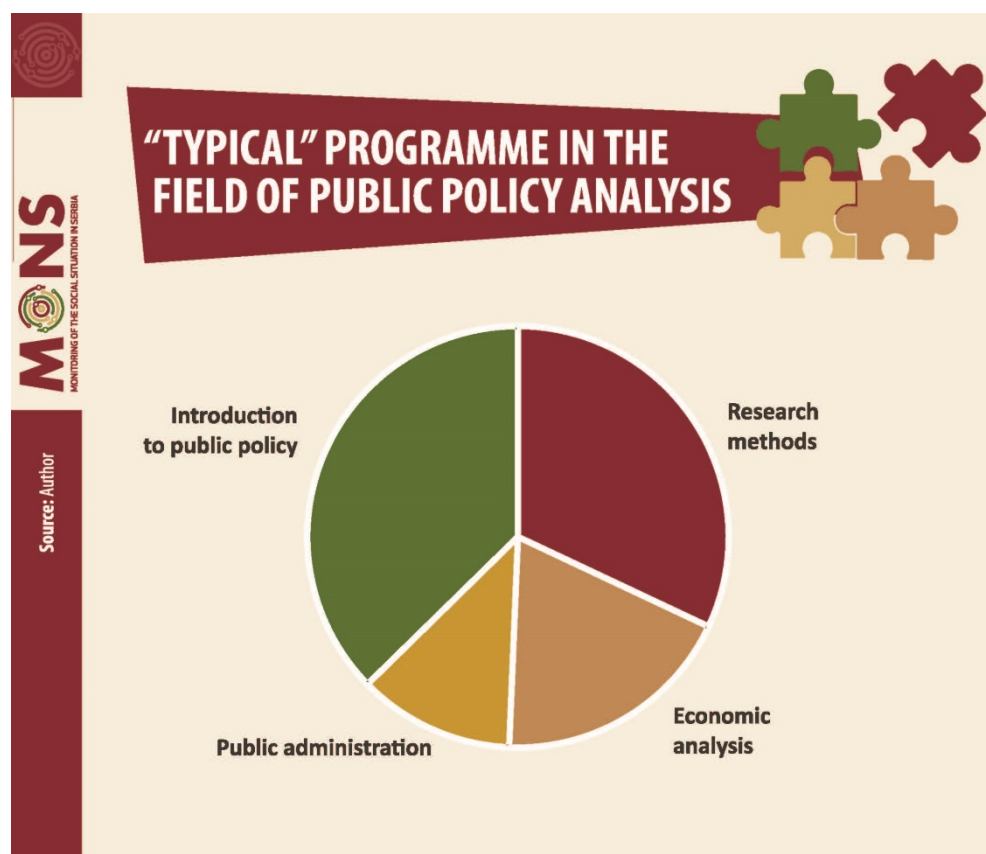
The first area, public policy making and analysis, introduces students to the discipline and provides context. Subjects provide an overview of the decision making process, the stakeholders and their roles in the process, implementation of public policies, the impact of the institutional environment, etc. In this way, students gain general insight and knowledge about the preparation, creation and choice of public policies. Comparative analysis is also an essential component of a large number of courses and subjects in this field. Approaches vary from university to university. A nice illustration of this motley is the "cloud" of key terms used in the subject names shown in Figure 1, so that the size of the term depends on the frequency of its use in the name of subjects in this area.



programme is closer to a master of public administration or the structure of students is such that they are mostly employed in state or local government. However, the presence of subjects in this area is also necessary in analytically oriented programmes. Firstly, they provide a better understanding of the context in which public policies are implemented, the ways in which public administration is organized and **managed**. Secondly, analysis for the sake of analysis will not bring improvement if one does not know the way of their implementation. The lack of these subjects in similar programmes offered by the US universities has been the subject of criticism. In other words, this group of subjects deals with approaches to defining problems, determining options, and other key steps in the process of public policy-making. Otherwise, in practice, the outcome of public policies could often be described by an economic buzzword "that the path to hell is paved with good intentions", that is, sophisticated economic analysis will be carried out for solutions that do not make much sense under the given circumstances and may be counterproductive.

As mentioned above, the programmes differ significantly. However, based on the analysis, we could say that the "typical" programme contains four compulsory subjects, of which 1.5 are subjects in the field of introduction to public policy, 1.3 subjects covering research methods and 0.7 and 0.5 subjects related to economic analysis and public administration respectively. The stated weighting factors indicate the possible distribution of the number of programme classes and ECTS points in the field of public policy analysis.

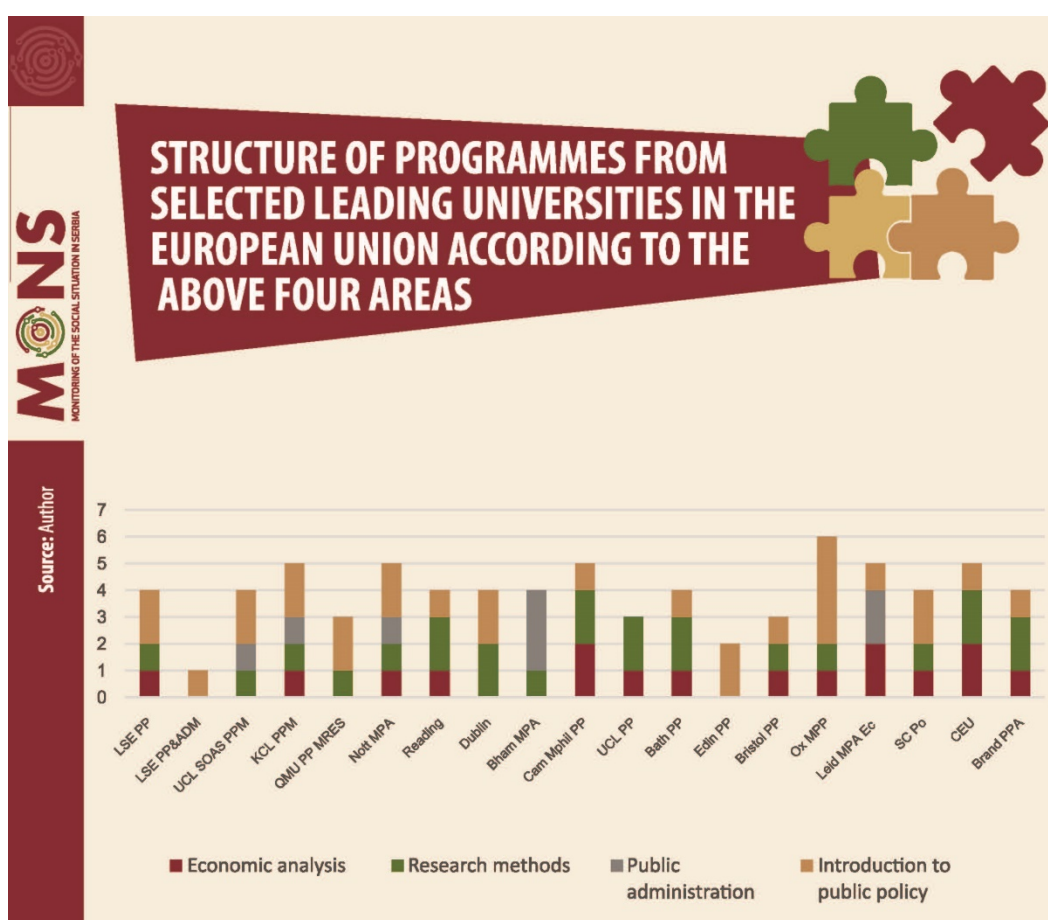
Figure 2. "Typical" programme in the field of public policy analysis



In addition to these four subjects, the programmes contain a wide variety of optional courses related to specific areas of public policy - health, education, environment or security. The lists of the available optional courses are often adjusted annually and usually depend on the availability of lecturers.

Figure 3.

Structure of programmes from selected leading universities in the European Union according to the above four areas.



An important determinant of educational programmes in the field of public policy is the use of different approaches and methods of teaching and knowledge transfer. As a rule, the emphasis is on the practical approach, so that the significant form of teaching is conducted through case studies and problem solving.

There are numerous challenges to formulating public policy education programmes. Their formation and sustainability will be an even more difficult undertaking. In other words, it is necessary to find the right balance (format and scope of the programme)



that will improve this field in the long term and create a sufficient number of quality "analysts". Swinging the balance solely toward methods and economic analysis would create a technically savvy caste of analysts who do not understand the logic of the intervention and who would conduct analysis for analysis sake rather than for problem solving. It is not enough to just analyse, but also to design public policy measures. Swinging the balance toward process and management would create analysts who are not that really. Therefore, partially restricting the freedom of choice and insisting on four areas as the "hard" core of such programmes is rather desirable. Finally, it is obvious that the competencies of future analysts and policy makers today require special skills - communication, critical thinking, processing a large amount of data. A program that does not incorporate these skills will not create **employable staff**.

An additional challenge will be the development of appropriate literature with local examples. The choice of textbooks in the field of public policy is not so rich, such as for example in economics. Also, their universality is limited by the specifics of national frameworks (similar to law), culture, prior knowledge that average students or civil servants have acquired in previous educational cycles.

Both processes will take three to five years at best. Great efforts are being made at our three largest universities through Erasmus Plus project PPMA – Interdisciplinary short cycle programs in policy making and analysis. As of 2018, a highly interdisciplinary team of professors from the University of Novi Sad, the University of Belgrade and the University of Niš has been developing 20 courses that will be combined into short programmes tailored to different students and their needs, but within the experience and practice of leading universities in Europe. Partners in this three-year capacity building project are the King's College London, University Paris-Est Creteil, University of Leiden as well as a French non-governmental organization dealing with innovations in the field of public policy - La 27e Région. In Serbia, in addition to the three universities, this project involves the Public Policy Secretariat and two non-governmental organizations - SeConS and FREN. These programmes cover the policy-making process; topics from the field of political institutions, in order to understand the political context for dealing with public policies; public sector economics and economic concepts needed for economic impact analysis and public policy evaluation; public sector management subjects; practical skills for impact assessment and public policy evaluation; managing international development projects; as well as various areas of public policy such as education, public health, social policy, agricultural policy and security policy and topics relevant to public policies at the local government level.

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