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Advancing Research in Arab Public Administration

2017 IASIA-MENAPAR Joint Conference

Ramallah, Palestine, 3-7 July 2017

Public Administration Under Pressure: Towards a Resilient, Responsive, Collaborative, and Transformative Public Administration

The Middle East & North Africa Public Administration Research (MENAPAR) Network is organizing its fourth international conference from 3 to 7 July, 2017 in Ramallah, Palestine as a joint conference with the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA). The conference will be organized by IASIA, the General Personnel Council of Palestine (GPC), and the Institute of Public Administration of Bahrain (BIPA).

The MENAPAR is a network of professionals and organizations in the Arab region with an interest in public administration research. Though focused on the Arab region, MENAPAR is open to participation from institutions, scholars and practitioners on a global basis. MENAPAR promotes evidence-based policy and decision-making in Public Administration.

The MENAPAR was established in April 2014 in Bahrain as an offshoot of a collaboration between BIPA and the UNDP. The two organizations have since funded the first project of the network, namely to develop a research agenda for Arab Public Administration. The local organizing partner, GPC, is the State body overseeing public administration in Palestine. Other key organizers include the Institute of Public Management and Territorial Governance (IMPGT) of Aix-Marseille University, the National School of Administration of France (ENA), the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It is also expected that other local and regional organizations will join the team partnering in the organization.

The organizing committee would like to cordially invite scholars and practitioners in the field of public administration and public governance to participate in the conference and submit their contributions for presentation.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The MENA region continues to face challenges on several fronts as a result of the continued political and social turmoil triggered by the Arab Spring, and exacerbated by the lack of much needed serious and long-due political, social, and economic reforms.

The challenges the region is facing, the fast-evolving context in which the governments are operating and wishing to steer, the continuous political and social turmoil's in addition to the increasing complexity in public policy action; all require an agile, globally informed, but regionally rooted approaches for public administration. It also requires new and innovative

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thinking in mapping and assessing regional public administrative capability and its abilities to plan, forecast, and respond to citizen's needs. Most importantly, it requires a pragmatic and realistic acknowledgement of the changing context in which it performs, and the willingness to adapt and respond to new political and social realities. Last but not the least, special attention needs to be given to collaborative approaches for regional public administration, and the need to build coordinated policy action between state and non-state actors because of their strong presence, particularly in conflict areas. These include Civil Society Organizations (CSO), international and regional donors and aid agencies, and the private sector.

Given the above context, this year's conference theme will be focused on the increasing challenges the regional public administration is facing in an environment characterized by social turmoil and continuous economic pressures. Hence, the main objective of the conference will be exploring best modes and approaches of public administration that embodies resilient, responsive, transformative, collaborative, and innovative elements.

CONFERENCE SUB-THEMES

The following themes will be debated in four parallel tracks. Plenaries, policy panels, and paper presentations will be programmed within each track over the 2 days. Plenaries and policy panels will intertwined with the IASIA conference within the overarching theme of the joint conference.

Submissions for MENAPAR can also be in Arabic.

Sub-Theme 1:

Delivering Public Administration beyond Physical and Structural Barriers: How Can Technological Innovation Support State and Non-State Actors to Better Outreach and Serve Citizens?

For this theme, we will examine the following issues:

- Can technological solutions overcome such barriers? For instance, can the investment in Telehealth technologies relieve the suffering of citizens who lack physical access to hospitals and unable to be adequately diagnosed or referred to medical centers?
- Can similar technologies be adopted to support the education and schooling in isolated towns and villages?
- Can rich and stable Arab governments which host specialized medical cadres and experts take a lead role in establishing specialized hubs to provide medical and training services to other countries in the region based on the telehealth concept?
- How can countries in the region create cheap, yet reliable learning and cooperation platforms to enhance their cooperation, share training and knowledge products, and solve common public sector problems?
- What role academic institutes, think tanks, private sector, and other non-state actors can play to advocate for the creation and utilization of such platforms?
- What are the best practices in this field to support state and non-state actors in delivering services to all citizens?

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Sub-Theme 2:

Public Management Reform Under Austerity Measures: How Can Governments Maintain their Reforms under Austerity Measures?

Some of the related questions that will be addressed include:

- What should be the guiding priorities for reform under the current circumstances?
- What are the best practices to engage the public and main stakeholders in ongoing/anticipated painful reforms?
- What are best practices in public sector reform approaches under austerity?
- What are the connections between austerity measures and public sector reform in the MENA region?

Sub-Theme 3:

State-building Approaches and the Role of International Organizations and Donors in Shaping Local Public Administration Structures in Conflict Ridden Countries.

Some of the related questions that will be addressed include:

- Since most of the state-building approaches rely excessively on foreign-funding, which comes with pre-attached conditions, one key challenge in such approaches remains ensuring the enhancement of sovereignty and local ownership of such programs. Hence, how can state-building approaches ensure the achievements of this key goal?
- Many of state-building approaches end up in the creation of “Parallel structures” or “dual bureaucracy”; where there are differentials in the pays and work conditions between two groups of nationals of a country; one that works for an under-resourced system, and the other works for a more advanced and privileged system of organizations created by donors. Is there another way to avoid the creation of such systems and stop the brain-drain from the national system towards the donors’ run system?
- State-building programs are characterized by the presence and involvement of a network of bilateral donors, multilateral institutions, and different coalitions of member states who might not share one common agenda over the state-building approach. In this environment, the key challenges remain: a) how to ensure the maximum harmonization between these different parties? and b) how to make sure that local government priorities, decisions, and effectiveness are not undermined?
- Most state-building approaches are implemented in countries where local governments have international legitimacy. Nevertheless, some countries remain engulfed in prolonged political divisions, and the legitimacy of local governments are disputed on the international front. Hence, can state-building approaches, or some segments of it, still be relevant in these countries?
- Most of state-building programs are affected by availability of funding and donors’ commitment to continue funding such programs. This makes these programs fragile in nature because of their reliance on external funding. What are the best practices in designing shocks-resistant, sustainable, and resilient state-building programs?

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Sub-Theme 4: Civil Society Organizations and governments in Public Services Delivery: Cooperating or Colliding?

Under this theme, we would like to explore the following issues:

- In countries that are heavily reliant on aid assistance through donors' funded CSOs programs, can aid assistance lead to a situation where governments' role in delivering public services becomes undermined, or governments are relieved from such responsibility, therefore shifting their attention to other priorities?
- How do we ensure that CSOs and local governments are collaborating over joint agendas rather than competing over conflicting agendas in responding to citizen's priorities and needs?
- In conflict-ridden countries where governments lack international recognition, how should CSOs coordinate and work together with governments in prioritizing and delivering social services?
- In contexts where governments are weakened or absent because of internal conflicts, how CSOs rank their priorities and how do they make sure that their interventions are balanced and not creating pockets of exclusion when reaching out to citizens?
- What are the long impacts of an expanded CSOs' presence on government's public administration performance in developing and fragile countries?

DEADLINES

- Proposals of abstracts: **15 February 2017**
- Decision and selection of papers: **3 March 2017**
- Final Papers: **15 May 2017**

Submission via www.iasia-menapar-conference2017.org

BEST PRACTICES CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The 2017 IASIA-MENAPAR Joint Conference will include an ancillary event on 3 July to showcase best practices in Public Administration and output from collaboration projects that have been started through the MENAPAR. The first such workshop was held in Tunisia on October 2015 while the second in Oman on October 2016. Both workshops were massively attended and witnessed the presentation of best practices from 7 different countries: Bahrain, Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, Palestine, France and Germany.

The best practices workshop that will be held in concomitance with the 2017 IASIA-MENAPAR Joint Conference will expand on the precedent workshops in Tunisia/Oman to include the following:

- A larger scope of country participations;
- Presentation(s) on the output/outcome of collaborations developed on the basis of the first and second best practices workshop portrayed in MENAPAR2015/ Tunisia & EUROMENA2016/Oman

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- Review of submissions by a committee of experts in public administration to ascertain the proof of concept as a requirement for presentation
- Development of award mechanisms for 'Best of the best practices'
- Publication of best practices in a compendium
- Best practices award criteria
- Conditions for participation
- Submissions can be in any of the following formats:
 - A written paper in the format of a case study
 - A video or animated presentation
 - A demo / storyboard display
 - A combination of the above or any other format / delivery that clearly outlines the best practice

Submissions for the best practices shall be made via the conference website no later than **26 March 2017**)

Best practices will be grouped within single sessions either on an industry or country basis. One hour and 15 min will be dedicated to each session with a maximum of 5 sessions for the day. If there are many submissions that are deemed worth presenting by the "committee of experts," parallel sessions could be considered.

Best practices should have undergone proof of concept with evidence to show their effectiveness (e.g. international benchmarking, impact analysis, etc.). Other than their basic functionalities/ working mode, lessons learned should illustrate the path to success and/or risks of failure.

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