

## GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: SPECIAL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ISSUE OF *PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ISSUES*

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This special English-language issue of *Public Administration Issues* brings together Russian and Western experts to discuss highly salient issues of public policy and administration. Authors grapple with the challenges of public administration in areas of finance and banking regulation, legal reform, housing and social policy, and formation of open government. Four of the articles focus on contemporary Russia and one on Poland, while two compare experiences of public administration in Russia and the West. The articles are intended to engage an international audience of public policy practitioners and experts. Their authors speak to issues and dilemmas that are common across country cases, such as the complexities of communicating between government and citizens, the tensions between societal and expert opinion on key policy issues, and the difficulties of designing social policy to balance equity and efficiency.

One theme of the issue concerns the role of expertise and rationality in public policy and administration. Ideally public policy should come from a rational, evidence-based process that is informed by experts' research findings. Public policy is a means to an end and experts' studies link cause and effect to identify the most effective means. However, real-world policy often departs from this ideal. The influence of experts in shaping public policy varies greatly across countries and policy areas, producing variation in approaches to similar problems. In some cases even strong expert consensus may be altered or rejected because it does not resonate with the attitudes of political leaders or publics. Relatively ineffective policies and methods of administration may result, and eventually lead to a new cycle of reforms. In this issue, the eminent scholar Peter Solomon shows the varying influence of criminal law experts in Europe, Russia, and the United States, and explains the limits of their influence. Experts may also fail to realize all the consequences of the policies they promote, because they cannot perfectly model complex realities. Real-world implementation often produces unintended or perverse consequences. Wathen and Allard's study finds both positive and negative effects of non-state administration of welfare provision in the United States. Public policies may also

be designed so that they are very difficult to administer, as Afanasiev and Shash show in their article on program-goal budgeting in Russia.

A second theme of this issue is the importance of e-technologies, both for administrative efficiency and for communication between public administrators, citizens, and the business community. Complex electronic databases play an essential role in the administration of public benefits such as pensions and, as Easter's article shows for Poland, the tax system. Databases can make information about policy changes and benefit eligibility available to users, facilitate applications, and bring access to remote locations. They can make regulatory systems and criteria for administrative application of regulations more transparent, and so improve predictability and trust in business and commercial sectors, as Kupryashin and Bodrov suggest for the regulation of commercial banks in Russia. E-technologies are also key to a new model of public administration that promises to improve openness and communication between government and citizens. E-government has the potential to engage civic organizations with government agencies and to provide channels for citizens' initiatives and debate. However, e-technologies are "tools" that may be used more or less effectively; as Dmitrieva and Styrin show in their article, it is relatively easy to provide information databases for citizens, more difficult to use e-technologies to mediate exchanges between administrators and societal actors. Khmel'nitskaya's case study of the housing sector suggests that the traditional methods of professional forums and consultations between government, business, and other interested parties remain effective methods in public administration.

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