

POLITICAL (IN)STABILITY AND PUBLIC POLICY TRANSPLANTATION: A MACEDONIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a set of new post-empiricist advances to public policy, drawing on discursive analyses and participatory, deliberative practices, have come to challenge the leading technocratic, empiricist models in policy analyses. According to Pessali, the transplantation of public policies is an influential instrument in the hands of economic development – important as it may be, transplantation may not be inevitably successful, therefore not always looked for. There are good economic reasons to consider the practice of grafting in public policy transplants, i.e., consideration for the specific cities of existing local institutions and how they may interact with a set of predominant policy requirements and guidelines. By taking into account Pessali's alternative method that institutionalizes some sort of cooperation between policy makers and stakeholders, in contrast with some other common variants of the policy transplantation method, we discuss an architecture for public policy inputs in a country context, which may help to avoid some of the underlying risks of standard transplantation architectures. The article concludes that the “transplantation metaphor” can be a powerful tool in organizing our thoughts and framing our decisions, which can lead to better use of it for the purposes of public policy design in societies only in cases of political stability.

KEYWORDS

Public Policy, Government, Institutional Transplantation, Institutional Design, Political Stability

1. INTRODUCTION

Pessali envisages a certain situation, which can take place in any corner of the world: A mayor visits a city abroad and comes back very enthusiastic about the urban development program they carry out; he wants this kind of program too. A consultant makes an appointment with a state commissioner; his model for local industrial development has been adopted elsewhere, and he wants to show that it is the right model for this country too. An international financing organisation says that it is inclined to help country X, but only if country X adopts a governance model that has proven successful in other nations. Every so often and in different ways, public agents are exposed to proposals for public policy transplantation. Be it at the national, regional, or local level; copying models shows an almost irresistible appeal. Someone else has already paid the costs of designing them, and the successful applications are on display as very persuasive evidence that the model is robust. But there seems to be ample factual evidence about the failure of public policy transplantation. [1]

This article treats the issues raised above, especially the limits of transplantation as a designing instrument for public policies in the case of the Republic of North Macedonia. “Two common variants of the policy transplantation method are discussed, and an alternative method is offered.

This alternative design seeks to make the most of the benefits associated with transplantation while overcoming some of its pitfalls” [1].

2. WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY INSIDE A SOCIETY?

Politics is a creator and agent regarding the society as one entity, analysed relating to the function of the society with all its elements as one artery that creates the bloodstream of the state. The same is considered as the energy that keeps the community alive.

Public policy creation is an interdisciplinary activity which incorporates the transformation of the political decisions into real actions which are implemented in the society [2]. One of the key stages in the development of any new public policies or adjustments of already existing policies is the process of adaptation and transformation of the legal framework, the legislation under which that policy is implemented. Publishing new regulation or analysing the already existing one need to have one starting point: addressing the problems from a particular area regarding the directly involved sides, as well the society as one entity. To achieve this, it is necessary to perform an exhaustive and detailed analysis, including the internal and external circumstances of the problem, to create regulatory or non-regulatory solutions, to make report on both sides, and the most importantly, to determine an optimal solution regarding the economic justification for the solution.

Based on the belief that the acquisition of knowledge and skills is a developmental process known as “learning through creating”, in the process of creation of the policy it is always necessary to have checklists as a useful tool in the course of writing policy papers.

According to the system theory, the requirements for political action arise from the problems and conflicts in the surrounding, and the same are transferred to the policy system.

Public policy has a significant impact on the entire societal development. At the same time, the surrounding restricts and directs the creators of the policy. The surrounding, by standard definition, includes the demographic and geographic features, political culture, social structure, the economic system, and the international surrounding as well.

3. PUBLIC POLICY IN A DEVELOPING SOCIETY

One important branch of the developing society literature has argued that underdeveloped countries or regions can benefit from transplanting policies in use in the developed countries or regions [3]. Underdevelopment is allegedly a proof that local institutions and policies are incapable of promoting economic development and must, therefore, be discarded in favour of foreign ones [4], [5], [6], [7].

The compelling rationale for transplantation cuts across the different political and geographic levels of public policy. Not only countries but also regions, states, and municipalities within them were taken as apt units for this process. “During this period, although many economists would acknowledge that localities were not created equal regarding their physical endowments or human competencies, the idea that public policies should be created equal in spite of these local specificities was considered a given” [8], [9], [10].

Different views of this situation sparkled and gained attention in underdeveloped and unequal countries, like ours, where it is important to create policy, but it is even more important to implement the public policies. Most of them, not necessarily new, are focused on the relevance of peculiar features of local socioeconomic driving forces. Overall, they call the attention to

endogenous factors that could enhance or hold back the impact of public policies. “Some of these views have used insights from institutional economics in one way or another to highlight the relevance of local values, customs, and interaction patterns” [1].

4. POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF SOCIETY

Policy design is the progress through which a society reflects on all segments of its development. Public policy is an accelerator of the processes that have a direct impact on the design of the society, but the stability of society has a great impact on the process of implementation of given public policy(ies) too. Nowadays we live under very complex socio-economic circumstances and turbulent social life which have a negative reflection for the application and development of the policies. “This type of tendency of changes, based on the free social ground, usually provides negative results” [11].

One of the many benchmarks in the stage of progress of Republic of North Macedonia on its road towards the EU was the vision for implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in all social pillars, set by the government. The question we seek to answer is: does the country’s stability represent a key factor for successful implementation of policies, taking into account the deep political crisis which started somewhere in 2012 and peaked in April 2017? Therefore, we are taking ICT policies implementation in the period 2012-2016 as a micro case study [12].

Figure 1 represents slight decline in the value (on a scale of 1 to 7) of one particular aspect of the operating environment (the importance of ICTs to the government’s vision), 4.88 in 2015, 4.82 in 2016. At one end of the scale, 1 represents the worst possible situation, at the other end of the scale, 7 represents the best.

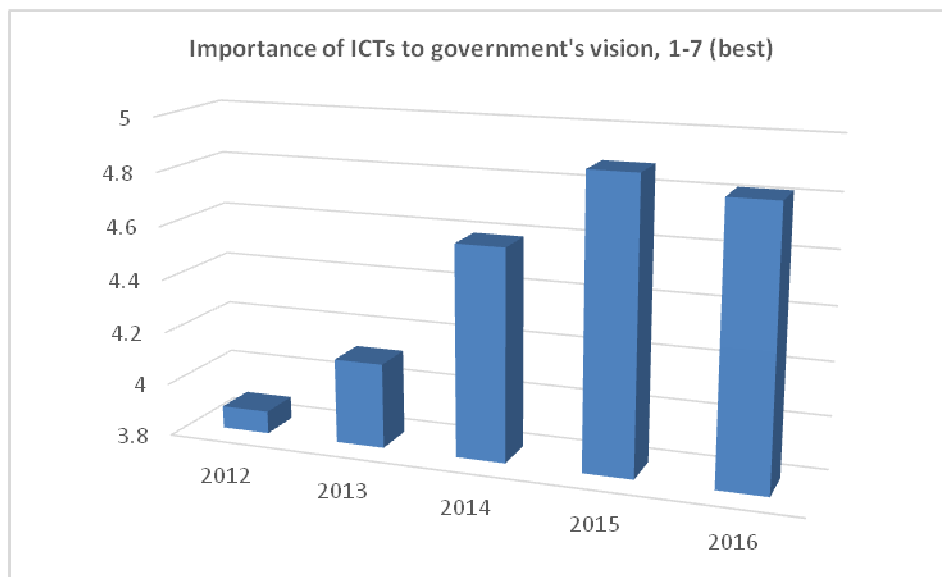


Figure 1. Importance of ICTs to government’s vision in the period of deep political crisis

A second case would be the quality of the implementation of the state’s educational policies, measured by a survey [13] administered by the World Economic Forum and conducted at national level by the Forum’s network of partner institutes (research or academic institutes, business organizations, national competitiveness councils, or other established professional entities and, in

some cases, survey consultancies). In administering the survey, in order to gather the strongest dataset, partner institutes were asked to follow detailed sampling guidelines to ensure that the sample of respondents is the most representative possible and comparable across the globe and in a specific timeframe. In this particular case, public policy is responsible for the improvement of the quality of the educational system. It shows a slight decline of the values in 2013 compared to 2012 (3.37 vs. 3.63) and in 2016 compared with 2015 (3.82 vs. 3.96), again on a scale of 1 to 7. All these facts clearly show the sub-standard implementation of the educational policy in 2013 in comparison with the educational policy from the previous year. Figure 2 gives a graphic explanation of this issue:

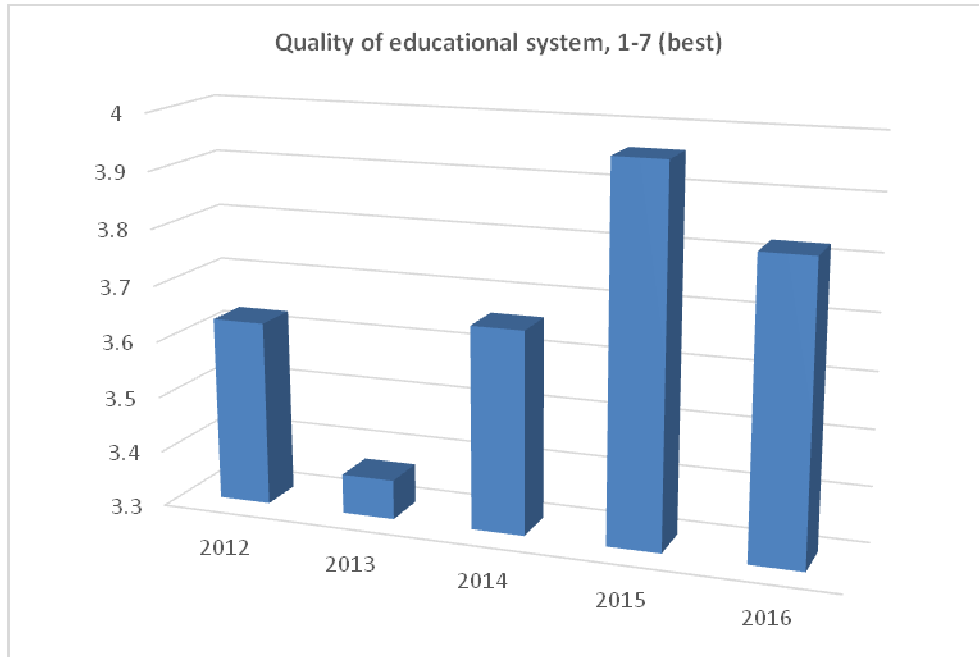


Figure 2. Quality of educational system in the period of deep political crisis

The greatest fluctuations during the past five years are noticed in:

- the percentage of enrolment in the secondary education (in a range of 81.91-83.67) (Figure 3);
- the percentage of enrolment in the higher education (in a range of 38.46-40.76) (Figure 4).

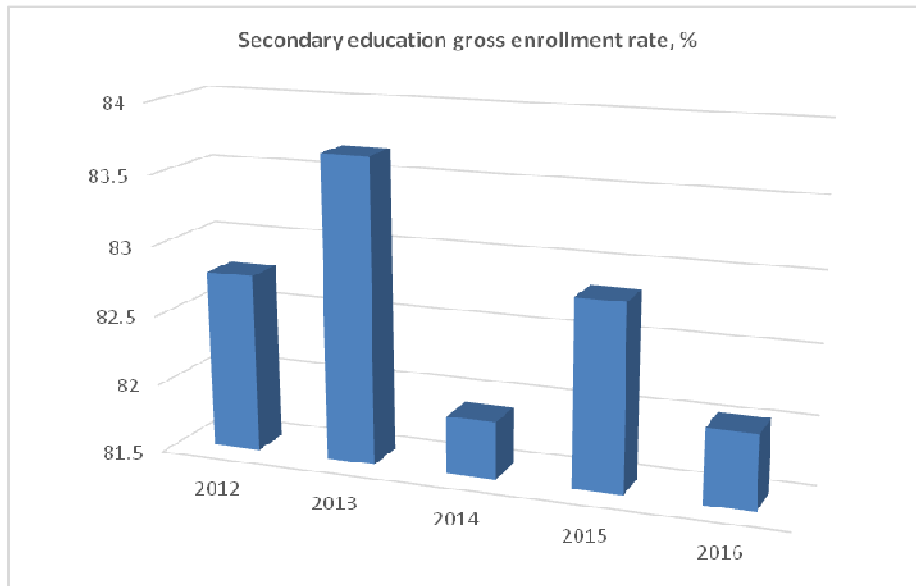


Figure 3. Secondary education gross enrolment rate in the period of deep political crisis

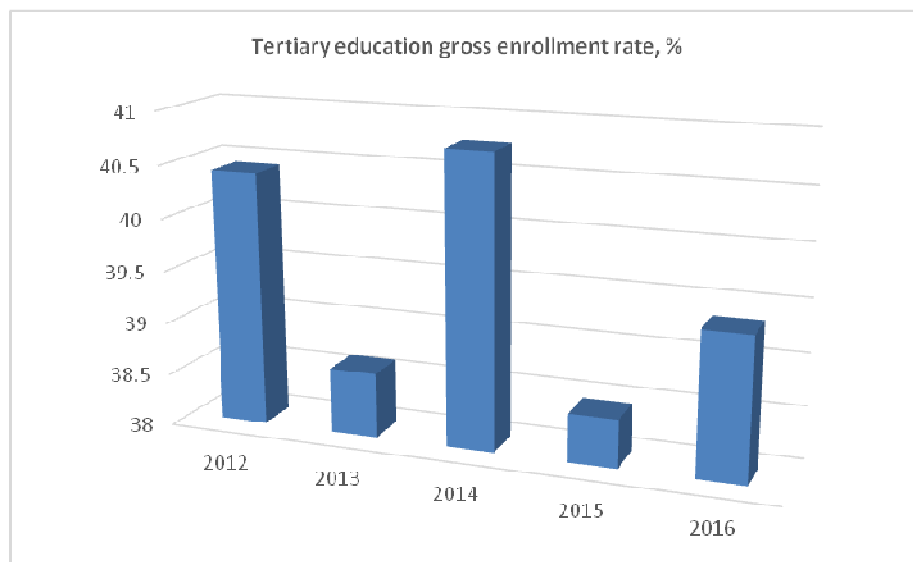


Figure 4. Tertiary education gross enrolment rate in the period of deep political crisis

It is evident that in 2016, at the peak of the political crisis, all public policy actors reduced their efforts in the process of creation and development of the policies, which globally resulted in a decline in the level of realisation, comparatively taken with 2015. This trend of decline in the coefficients may be considered as a consequence of the political instability in the country during the last period. Other factors, such as immigration, as a result of the political instability would need to be seriously examined as well, especially in regard to ennoblement in schools and universities.

The greatest decline in 2016, compared with 2015 (from 5.00 to 4.87), is the success of the Government in its promotion of ICT (Figure 5) – one of the top priorities of the created policy by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

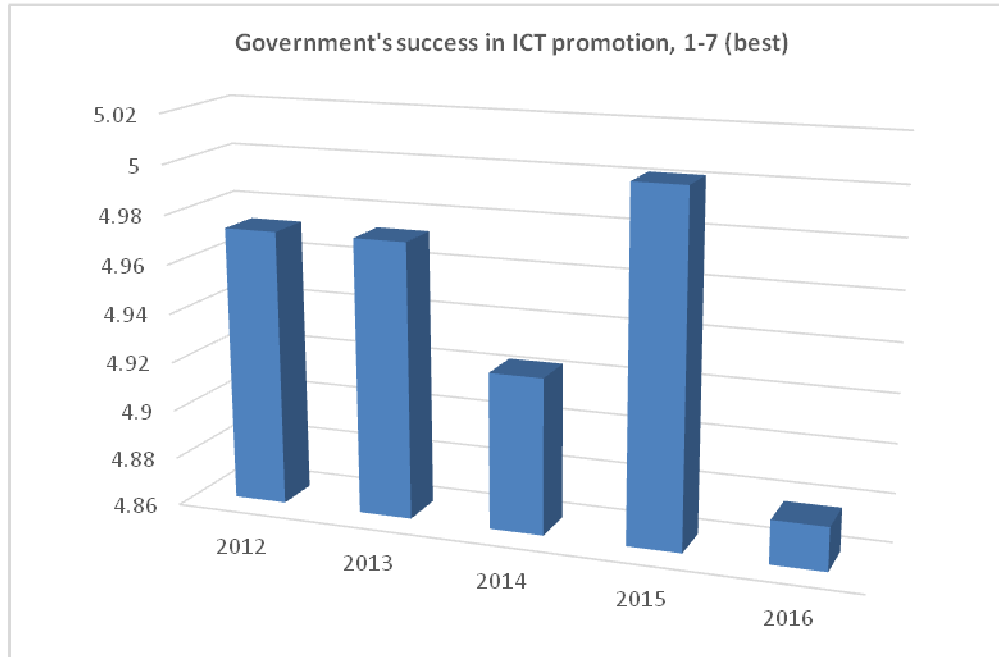


Figure 5. Government's success in ICT promotion in the period of deep political crisis

This clearly demonstrates the minor dedication of the factors in the process of creation and implementation of the policies in 2016, as a result of the political instability in the country. Overall this tendency of the decline of the indexes of the indicators has an adverse influence on the development of the society as one entity.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Institutions and public policies may be quickly imagined, but they are not easy to be implemented and grow into common practice, especially in countries that are in a cycle of political instability. "Some laws and norms make a huge impact, while others are simply mistreated; some social practices are widely reproached, but we just seem unable to act collectively to stop them" [1]. The transplantation of public policies lives in this kind of globe. It provides a robust architecture for institutional change and economic development [11]. In certain circumstances, grafting seems to be a useful procedure in the transplantation of public policies.

In our case, the implementation of public policies was faced with many problems and challenges stemming from the stability of the overall political atmosphere. Analyzing 2016 we can notice that the parameters of implementation have plummeted, as a result of the political situation where public policy creators could not succeed in achieving the desired pace of implementation. The Republic of North Macedonia is undergoing through a complex period where the implementation of policies is not on the appropriate level, which leads to the conclusion that "societal design" was underperforming.

The institutional designs used to formulate and implement public policies can be drawn in such a way as to allow grafting. Inserting a negotiation mechanism in the design of public policies makes it more time-consuming, but also more sustainable. "On the other hand, a negotiated design permits the narrowing of the gap between an idealised policy design and a design that effectively takes into account local specificities" [14].

The transplant metaphor can be a powerful tool in organizing our thoughts and framing our decisions, and we can make better use of it for the purposes of public policy design in society in general, however not in a turbulent period, but rather in times of political stability. Therefore, it seems that policy makers have to have this goal as a primary objective, before they can implement more subtle policy reforms, be they transplanted, grafted or entirely “original.”

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