Developing a Research Agenda for Public Management in the MENA

Inaugural conference of MENAPAR
Manama, Bahrain, 23-24 April 2014

In the midst of fast evolving changes in the Middle East on different fronts, be it the organization of the political and governance systems, the basic economic models adopted, the failure of the welfare system, the widespread popular contestations, and a myriad of challenges that past and current governance systems have failed to cope with, it has become critical for Public Administration to reform in order to address the region’s unique history and rapidly evolving systems of government; which calls for a focused effort to understand governance in times of transition and to support this reform with local research, global experience, and new thinking.

The urgency of tackling challenges for good public management and governance has been heightened in the aftermath of latest changes and turmoil in the region. Pressures have come to bear not only on countries where political change has taken place but went beyond as Governments rush to quell the sources of public discontent, respond to public demands for greater voice and accountability, and achieve political consensus and progress in social justice.

However and aside from the normative prescriptions of multilateral bodies, there is very little thinking going into any critical analysis or development of proper solutions for the transitional governance situations that are gripping most countries in the region. Moreover and whenever good quality research exists, it is mostly about public policies and rarely about public administration. A Google search on “Public administration research in the MENA” is very telling of the dearth of research in the field of PA in the region.

The Institute of Public Administration, Bahrain (BIPA) is spearheading efforts to federate research efforts in the region in the broader field of public administration/public policy with a focus on spurring local thinking and translating it into successful local practices.

Background and Rationale

In 2010, BIPA and the UNDP Country Office signed an agreement on establishing a Capacity Development Facility (CDF) hosted at BIPA. The CDF aims to enhance the capability of BIPA in serving the public sector and promote BIPA as the reference point for capacity building in training, consulting and research for governmental institutions in Bahrain. BIPA has since transcended its national geographical boundaries and is now involved in regional as well as international activities. In June 2013, it organized the international joint congress of IIAS/IASIA with more than 500 participants and 250 paper presentations. One of the offshoots of the Congress was the MENAPAR (Middle East and North African Public Administration Research) initiative which is being set up as a study group of IIAS (International Institute of Administrative Sciences) and will be soon extended into a full fold regional group of IIAS.
What is MENAPAR?

MENAPAR is being set-up as a network of organizations (networks) that are active in the scholarship/practice of Public Administration in the Middle East and thus named Middle East & North Africa Public Administration Research (MENAPAR). Contrary to conventional research networks which mainly associate ‘research providers,’ public sector organizations with an interest both to produce and use research are sought as active members of the MENAPAR.

BIPA will facilitate the launch of MENAPAR until it is established independently within a regional group of public administration as part of the IIAS network of regional groups. An organizational meeting of MENAGPA (the regional group that will host MENAPAR) is expected to take place during the MENAPAR conference in Bahrain on 23-24 April 2014.

Though focused on the Arab region, MENAPAR will be open to participation from institutions, scholars and practitioners on a global basis. However it will not be (yet) another organization competing for the Public Administration, public policy, and governance agenda in the region. Rather, it will try to create synergy effects between existing ones.

Purposes of MENAPAR:

MENAPAR seeks to:

- become a forum for research and academic/practitioner exchange on the important topics of public administration, public policies, and good governance in the Arab region.

- harness the collective intellect and efforts of organizations in the region to promote evidence-based PA and policy-making.

- promote a research culture and research capacities in the region’s public sectors.

- develop an indigenous research discourse on PA; one that tackles the problems of PA in the region as identified by the local actors.

- provide a resource base for all actors in the Arab PA scene to use evidence for policy and decision-making. Resources can be in terms of people/consultants, research, or networking.
MENAPAR Conference
Following two first preliminary events where the concept was first tested and then elaborated, BiPA and the UNDP will hold a two-day MENAPAR conference on “developing a research agenda for public management in the MENA.” A call for contributions has been developed herewith and seeks your participation in the conference through an extended abstract. A presentation will be requested upon acceptance of your submission. Other than presenting research about Arab public administration, the conference will include two plenaries one on the research agenda for MENAPAR, and the second will lay the ground for the formal establishment of a MENA group of PA. Those who are interested in participating in such a group are encouraged to attend.

Conference Themes
All research papers related to Arab public administration are welcome. Suggested topics include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Human resource management and performance management
- Employee engagement and talent management in the Public Sector
- Public service diversity and gender issues
- Strategies for Capacity building in the Public Sector
- Professionalization of the public sector
- Public Sector Leadership
- Transformational government
- E-government
- Open-Government and e-citizenship
- Quality management in PA
- Public Sector integrity
- Public Governance & Territorial Governance
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Transitional Governance.
- Public financial management
- Policy-making & assessment
- Public Service delivery
- Public sector innovation
- Measuring public administration performance
- Political-administrative relations

This first conference seeks to canvass existing research and researchers with a focus on PA in the Arab region, hence the generality of the theme. Further conferences will be more focused.
Research Agenda and Format
As the objective of this initial conference is to survey the research scene in the Arab region, submissions should focus on accounts of the present situation. Analytical frameworks and other theoretical propositions should be anchored in the reality of Arab Public administration. Descriptions of current administrative practices (even the less successful ones) in the region are welcome as long as they are followed with proper analysis suggesting modes of improvement and research avenues. Case studies are particularly welcome although all other methods are acceptable. Empirical studies are highly sought. Authors are required to submit an extended abstract of no more than 2000 words (minimum of 1000) for consideration by the conference program committee. Upon acceptance, authors will have to submit presentations. Full papers are not required except for submissions that will be considered for publication in the Arabic version of the International Review of Administrative Sciences. Papers raising issues about research in Arab PA are particularly encouraged. Select submissions will be invited on a fully-paid basis (travel and stay). Only full-paper submissions (min of 4000 words) and developing the theme of 'a research agenda for PA in a specific country or region' will be considered for fully-paid invitation. While covering any of the conference topics, invited submissions should emphasize one or several of the following:

- Survey of research issues and mapping out a research agenda in Arab PA.
- Methodological issues in Arab PA research.
- Research models and methodologies in a specific Arab PA issue.
- Ethical and policy issues in Arab PA research.
- Creating a research culture in Arab PA.
- Building a research absorption capacity in Arab PA.
- Impact assessment of research in Arab PA.
- Research design issues in Arab PA research.
- Comparative research in Arab PA.

Important Dates:
Authors will be notified of the acceptance/rejection of their submission by March 16th, 2014.

- Deadline for submission of final presentations: March 30th, 2014.

- Conference dates: 23-24 April 2014

Submissions can be sent directly to the Program Chair: Dr. Sofiane Sahraoui, s.sahraoui@bipa.gov.bh
Language:
Submissions can be in Arabic, English or French. All presentations will be translated and displayed in English and Arabic. For those who will present other than in Arabic, English and/or Arabic translation will be provided.

Logistics:
Venue and location will be announced later. The conference committee is negotiating with local hotels for preferential tariffs for guest stay. Those will be posted on the conference web page by March 2nd, 2014.

Conference Registration:
There are no fees for the conference. However all participants have to register on the conference Website (http://www.bipa.gov.bh/menapar).
Participant benefits include conference program and bag, coffee breaks, lunches (2), and a dinner reception. Visits to local attractions/events are also being considered.

Contact Persons:
For all conference inquiries, please contact Ms. Batoul Murad, b.murad@bipa.gov.bh